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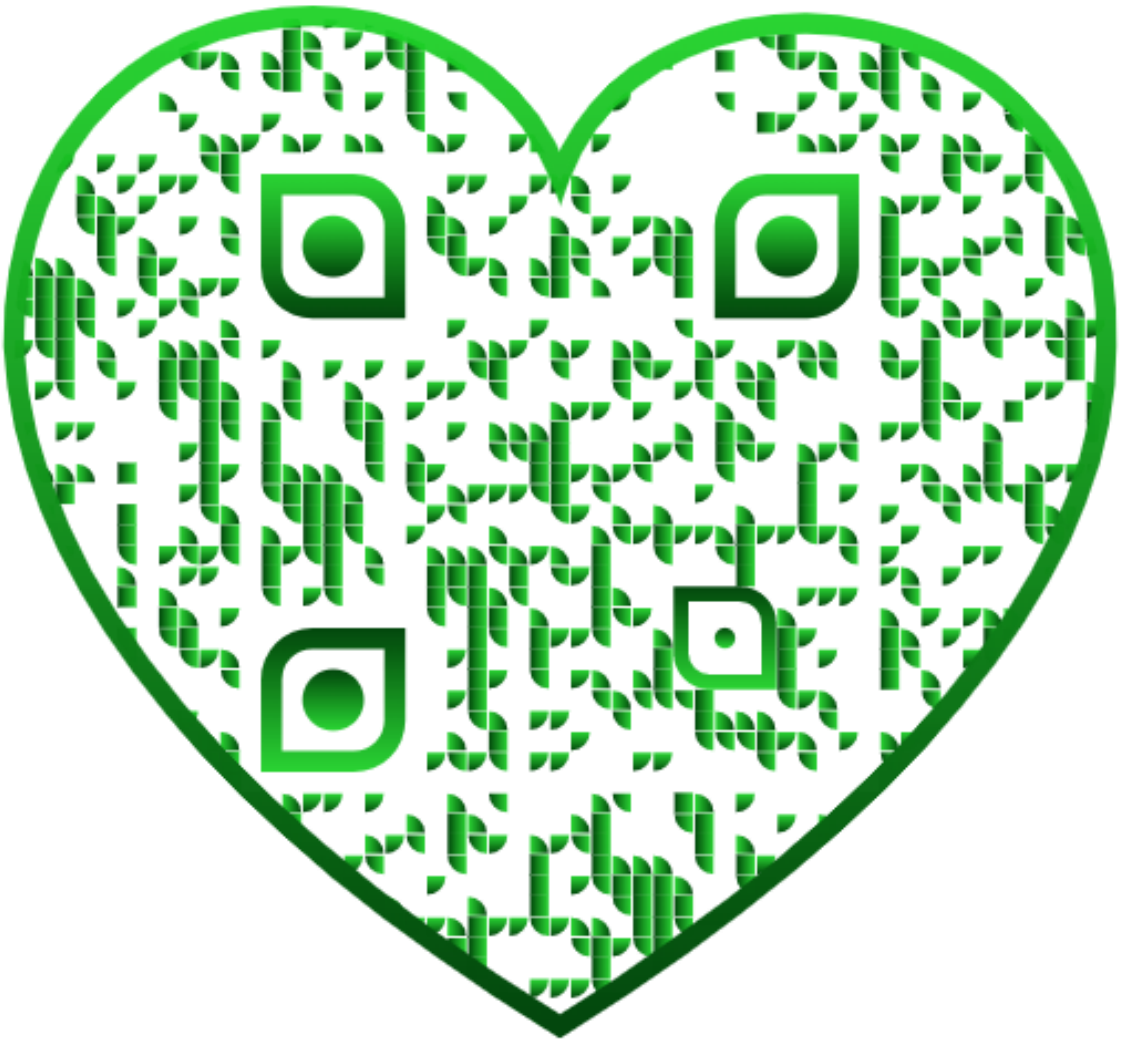

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From the album: Hitherside
www.hitherside.com

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From the album: Rock 'N' Roll Mafia
www.rockstarframe.com

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From the album: Space Elevator
www.spaceelevatorband.com

5. **Pop Evil** - Footsteps
From the album: Up
www.PopEvil.com

6. **Rage** - Cry From a Hill
From the album: Run For The Night
www.rockcandyrecords.co.uk

7. **Degreed** - Madness
From the album 'Dead But Not Forgotten'
www.sunhillproduction.com

8. **Reach** – Fortune and Fame
From the album Reach Out To Rock
www.sunhillproduction.com

9. **DBC & Friends** - Whiskey Land
From the album: Whiskeyland
www.facebook.com/dbcandfriends

10. **Hardbone** - Sound of the City
From the album: Bone Hard
www.hardbone.net

11. **Free From Sin** - Evershine
From the album: Free From Sin
www.freefromsin.net

12. **Skin & Bone** - Burn The Blue Sky
From the album: Revenge
www.skinandboneband.co.uk

13. **Last Joker** - Spellbound
From the album: Ulterior Motives
www.facebook.com/lastjokerofficial

14. **Goodnight Ritual** - Hits the Spot
From the album: Trade Mark
www.GoodnightRitual.com

15. **Wizzö** - Hellraiser
From the album: Real Hot Stuff
www.facebook.com/Wizzofficial

16. **Aeraco** - Grimm
From the album: All or Nothing
www.aeraco1.com

17. **Conspiracy Theory** - Love n Pain
From the album: #1
www.facebook.com/CTSmogen?fref=ts

18. **Sins** - Restless Sinners
From the album: Sins
www.sins-band.com

19. **Loaded Gun** - Addicted
From the album: Loaded Gun
www.reverbnation.com/loadedgunrocks

20. **Stella by Starlight** - No Reason To Rewind
From the album: Let It Sleep
www.facebook.com/stellabystarlightsweden

21. **Marc Vanderberg** - Devil May Care
From the album: The Four Elements
www.marcvanderberg.com

22. **Easy Rider** - Live for Another Day
From the album: From The Darkness
www.easy-rider.es

23. **MetacordiuM** - My Fire
From the album:'Más Allá de Los Acordes
www.metacordium.com

24. **Electus!** - Rider
From the album: Rider!
www.electus-music.uk

25. **Beat The Drag** - Insignificant Other
From the album: What's Your Damage?
www.beatthedrag.com

GROUP TWO: 70s RETRO ROCK & BLUES & SOUTHERN ROCK & AMERICANA/FOLK

26. **Jeff Fetterman** - Wash My Blues Away
From the album: Bottle Full Of Blues
www.jefffetterman.com

27. **Levee Dwellers** - Boogie You Down
From the album: Leveling Up
www.leveedwellers.com

28. **Witchwood** - Rainbow Highway
From the album: Litanies From the Woods
www.facebook.com/Witchwoodband

29. **Keith Thompson Band** - Paid My Dues
From the album: Catch The Fire
www.densitymusic.com

30. **Spirit Level** - It's A Hard Life
From the album: Kolossi Blues
www.spiritlevelblues.com

31. **Kevin Danzig** - A Case Of Karma
From the album: Playground
www.kevindanzig.com

32. **Harold Mike Sizemore** - Dark Haired Young Dream
From the album: That Old Man n' Me
www.haroldmikesizemore.com

33. **The Mighty Neptunes** - Panhandle
From the album: American Blue
www.themightyneptunes.com

34. **Electric Mind Machine** - Rabbit Hole
From the album: Electric Mind Machine
www.facebook.com/electricmindmachine

35. **Gers Racing** - You And I
From the album: Part II Existence
www.gersracing.com

GROUP THREE: PROGRESSIVE & PSYCHEDELIC ROCK

36. **The Powwow Rock Orchestra** - Everybody Powwow
From the album: Everybody Powwow!
https://soundcloud.com/spiderhawk_records/everybody-powwow-1

37. **Magic Pie** - Trick Of The Trade
From the album: King For a Day
www.magicpie.no

38. **Deckchair Poets** - Jerk
From the album: Searchin' For A Lemon Squeezer
www.deckchairpoets.com

39. **Driftglass** - The Unfolding
From the album: All That Remains
www.driftglass.net

40. **Inner Odyssey** - My Purpose
From the album: Ascension
www.innerodyssey.com

41. **Burkhard Mahler** - Let It Shine
From the album: Cinematic & Classic Edition 1
www.burkhardmahler.de

42. **UVTraveler** - Traveler
From the album: UVTraveler
www.uvtraveler21stc.com

43. **Crystalwood** - Follow Me
From the album: Solaire
www.facebook.com/crystalwoodband

44. **Squonk Opera** - A Cloud Of Gray
From the album: Pneumatica
www.squonkopera.org

45. **Anonymous Iconclasts** - 29 Degrees
From the album: Downstairs For Dancing
www.anonymousiconoclasts.com

46. **Drifting Sun** - The Wizard
From the album: Trip the Life Fantastic
www.driftingsun.co.uk

47. **Twin Arrows** - Wasted
From the album: Hell And Back
www.twinarrows.fr

48. **Eziak** - Tzamala
From the album: No Place Land
www.facebook.com/pages/Eziak/234873819932819

49. **Void** - The First Void
From the album: Present Sign
www.facebook.com/pages/Void/158547220980556?ref=bookmarks

50. **Gis** - Race To Victory
From the album: Electric Blue
www.facebook.com/gisinstrumentalrock

51. **The Steve Coyne Conspiracy** - The Green Scuzz
From the album: Feelings Of Euphoria
www.stevecoyne.com

52. **ISOS** - Leave My Mind
From the album: Loving On Standby
www.facebook.com/pages/ISOS/107345772750739/

51. **D Project** - Out of Range
From the album: Making Sense
www.thedproject.com

54. **Arcane Atlas** - Static Perception
From the album: Constellation Plus
www.arcaneatlas.com

GROUP FOUR: SYMPHONIC ROCK/ POWER METAL AND HEAVY METAL

55. **Ritchie Kelly's Overture** - Karma On a Scale
From the album: Opus #1
www.RitchieKellysOverture.com

56. **El Clan** - Oceanos
From the album: El Clan
www.facebook.com/elclanmx

57. **Worhol** - Voices From Above
From the album: The Awakening
www.worhol.net

58. **Negacy** - Flames of Black Fire
From the album: Flames Of Black Fire
www.negacyofficial.com

59. **Elyose** - De Guerre Lasse
From the album: Ipso Facto
www.elyose.com

60. **The Morganatics** - We Come From the Stars
From the album: We Come From The Stars
www.themorganatics.com

61. **Soaprevelations** - Youth Illusions
From the album: Youth Illusions
www.facebook.com/soaprevelationsmusic

62. **The Long Escape** - World Going Down
From the album: The Warning Signal
www.thelongescape.com

63. **Wintersgrey** - Momma
From the album: A War Within
www.facebook.com/Wintersgreytheband

64. **Backjumper** - Wolves At My Door
From the album: Haze
www.facebook.com/BACKJUMPER

65. **Sunless Sky** - Immortality
From the album: Firebreather
www.sunlesssky.com

66. **Armifera** - Blunt Force Trauma
From the album: Eradication
www.armifera.com

67. **Voron** - Kill This Day feat. Mus (Arkan)
From the album: Propaganda
www.voronstudio.com

68. **Polarity Six** - Solarians
From the album: Solarians
www.polaritysix.com

GROUP FIVE: MODERN/ALTERNATIVE ROCK

69. **Self Deception** - Killed Our Love
From the album: These Walls
www.selfdeception.se

70. **Choices** - Coming To Life
From the album: Paradise Lost
www.choicesofficial.com

71. **We Used to Be Friends** - You In The Garden
From the album: We Used to Be Friends
www.weusedtobefriendsband.com

72. **Deadly Cirus Fire** - House Of Plagues
From the album: The Hydra's Tailor
www. facebook.com/deadlycircusfire

73. **Anti-Flag** - Brandenburg Gate
From the album: American Spring
www.spinefarmrecords.com

74. **Hilo Negro** - La Flor
From the album: Cuántico
www.hilonegro.com.mx

75. **I'm Kingfisher** - National Pen
From the album: Avian
www.imkingfisher.com

76. **Drive By Wire** - Kerosine Dreams
From the album: The Whole Shebang
www.drivebywire.nl

77. **Silence The Machine** - Wolf in Sheeps Clothing
From the album: Silence The Machine
www.facebook.com/SilenceTheMachine

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EDITORIAL

It's summer time, which means it's that time of year when the festivals are out in force, music releases tend to slow a little bit, and people go on holiday. Well, here I am alone in the studio, surrounded by mirrors (people think that's to make the room look busy, but it's just so I can enjoy the view) tasked with the job of writing the Editorial, because everyone is off enjoying themselves.

If you went to festivals such as Download or Sweden Rock, you can enjoy reminiscing with our superb coverage of both events in this issue. Our busy writers also indulged in busman's holidays by mailing in live reports in from the likes of the USA, Canada, Germany and... Norwich. Not bad for a UK based magazine.

Holiday season or not, there's still a wealth of new releases covered here, nearly 150 albums in fact! This issues' Playlists was wide open with a sprawling collection of great stuff from all sorts of genres to choose from. Rock is dead? Nah.

On the subject of new records, presumably in a bid to make Joe Bonamassa look lazy, those British Rockers Ten are back again with another new release. They have a cracking new EP coming out early in September called 'The Dragon And Saint George'. If you enjoyed their last album 'Isla De Muerta' then this is right up your street, as it collects some choice cuts from there and mixes them in with no less than three brand new songs. Check out page 61's review and the ad on page 72...

As you will no doubt have noticed from the cover, our pages have been graced one again by the usually elusive Ritchie Blackmore and his delightful wife Candice Night. I was privileged to conduct what is now my third interview with the pair and Ritchie was particularly talkative. I love Blackmore's Night, just as I love Deep Purple and Rainbow, so those who miss Ritchie's days of rocking will be intrigued by what he has to say about his plans for next year. As for the personnel involved... well, let the speculation begin!

A question that often comes up is how come Fireworks manages to get interviews with Ritchie Blackmore, sometimes exclusives, where other much bigger magazine's fail. The answer is, quite simply, trust. We've had no less than six interviews with Ritchie, and we don't mis-quote, we aren't interested in baiting in order to get a cheap headline or soundbite, and we are genuine fans of his work. As he said himself in FW28, "I don't like doing interviews when it's uncomfortable" and Candice added in FW53 that "that's why he agreed to this one, Fireworks has offered good support and it's appreciated." When you consider FW53 was the issue that contained the story of Rainbow's demise, something they'd never spoken about before, we're obviously doing something right.

So, with another issue finished... there's only one more before we have to start whittling down the list for my top ten releases of 2015. I'd best start now...!

James

Interview by Julia Braun

Still remembering the magnificent shows of Royal Hunt during their tour in 2014, I was happily surprised that after such a short time of waiting the Danish/American/Swedish Progressive Metal band with various incredible musical influences and a gigantic range of diversity were back with their 13th studio album, 'Devil's Dozen'. They have returned with a statement, more ingenuity, an interesting pledge campaign and of course several musical surprises.

Once more, I had the privilege to talk to virtuoso André Andersen about the processes behind the record, his thoughts, their line-up change and so much more.

Only about a year and a half since your last release 'A Life To Die For' you will soon release 'Devil's Dozen'. Since there's nothing to really give an indication of where the title comes from, I'd certainly be very curious to find out...

Some years ago I read a novel about a man buying an abandoned house in England, around the 19th century. A chain of unfortunate events changes his life for the worst and one day, while he restlessly walks around the house, he stumbles over a chest full of letters in the attic. Letters from people he never knew to a previous owner of the house whom he never met. Day by day, as he gets more and more intrigued, the stories from letters start to take over his life…of course, with some mystical and dramatic ending. While working on songs for our new album I remembered the story and tried to write lyrics just as these letters; from one unknown person to another, stories without a beginning and without a definitive ending.

Kai Brockshmidt – our graphic artist – started working on the album cover with "13" in mind so I suggested using an old idiom (13 = Devil's Dozen) which resonated somewhat well with the mystical story my lyrics were based on. The guy burning with a huge XIII behind his back, letters flying everywhere. This is a strong, almost apocalyptic, image that compliments both the lyrical concept and the musical content which is quite diverse yet large sounding.

As with previous releases, I discovered an incredibly large amount of musical facets and the varied instrumentation. Still, I can't get rid of the impression Royal Hunt made a rather big step into Power/Symphonic Metal...

I strongly believe that an artist has to evolve and that it should come naturally. I've always had my main influences in Classic Rock, Progressive and Classical music yet the way your next album will turn out is impossible to predict. There's five people involved and each and every one of them putting their own stamp on your original idea. As far as the sound goes I've been toying with the idea of bringing some "modern" production techniques and sounds to the party and – in combination with Classical instruments – the album ended sounding more contemporary than our previous releases yet still containing all the trademark elements of Royal Hunt.

We're very fortunate to have a recognisable, signature sound today. But after a bunch of years we kind of "crystallised" that uniqueness through our song-writing, arrangements, production and most importantly, a special atmosphere on each release.

What can you tell us about Allan Sørensen's exit from Royal Hunt and how Andreas Habo Johansson made his way into the band?

Being a permanent member of the band is getting more and more difficult these days. Balancing your personal life with all the obligations you have in a working band is tough. Down the road you might realise that your priorities shifted and you're not in sync with the rest of the guys. We wish Allan all the best. We've been in touch with Andreas since 2007 (Allan had to sit out the tour that year due to birth of his child). We couldn't make our schedules work back then but this time around we managed and couldn't be happier with Andreas' input. I'd say he brought more of an aggressive, modern sound and way of playing into the band.

Another innovation is your pledge campaign on Pledge.com. When I read the details and further information on the page I realised this is about giving the fans the possibility to get a deeper insight into the writing and recording-process. Other "Pledgers" set a target amount they aim to achieve until a certain date, whereas your campaign is open ended. Can you explain those aspects to us?

There are two kinds of Pledge campaigns; crowd funding where you set up a goal and when it's been reached, you print your CDs and fulfil your obligations. In case you didn't reach your goal the whole thing's cancelled. We opted for the pre-ordering one. It's mainly used by bands who do have a record deal so the actual release is guaranteed regardless. Fans can get signed items, rarities such as specially designed t-shirts, out of print stuff, etc. It's been – and still is, the pre-ordering campaign will run until September – a great experience. You're dealing with your fans one on one, delivering your new album almost personally to them. And during the entire process of recording you're having kind of a dialogue: they can see and hear every aspect of the process, ask their questions, get the latest developments first, receive all the info first-hand and show you their support which is the most important thing.

The "music world" has changed indefinitely and it's hard to predict the future of it, but when I saw the list of people presented on Pledge – such as Slash and Megadeth – I realised that the system has already been established enough and became, possibly, the best way to connect with your fans directly.

And to your question about the money; no, we won't just pocket it and go about buying new sport cars and mansions on the Bahamas! The budget you're getting from your record company today is minimal and in order to maintain the quality standard of our albums we used the extra means to invest in more studio time, a great mixing place; spend more time working with Classical musicians and we'll maybe even do a video… the list is endless. And you're getting these possibilities from the very same people you're doing it for, so everybody wins. I just want this band to get bigger and better with every step of the way. I've heard that it gets harder as time goes by and after twenty plus years in this business you're supposed to start running out of steam…but this band keeps moving just like a bulldozer!

Stellar Revival's bassist Dan Uricoli should perhaps be sitting in a therapists chair trying to make sense of the demise of his band Stellar Revival, rather than doing an interview to introduce his new band Southern Gentlemen. Understandable given the length of time that it finally took for the album to be released, the record label shenanigans and the toll that it took on the personnel within the band. Uricoli wants to set the record straight and make sense of why one of the greatest Modern Rock albums became synonymous with the corporate behemoth of the music industry. He's also rather chipper about his new band Southern Gentlemen, as he talks to Mike Newdeck.

"It really had a huge affect on my life," he explains. "You try to move on but sometimes you can't help reflecting. Stellar Revival first started with mega-producer Brian Howes, we were always big Hinder fans. I'd examine the sleeve notes to see who contributed and I found out that Brian was their producer. His style suited us, and we liked Closure. I was working a corporate position with Apple making great money and our drummer was studying to be a lawyer. The money allowed us to get in touch with Brian. I eventually got hold of the Van-Howes studio screen name on AOL instant messenger after a few dead ends I got hold of him through Chief at Chief management group who managed Hinder and was once Nickelback's tour manager who put us in touch with Brian via his manager. Price was agreed and then we went to his studio for six days."

So Stellar Revival did it slightly differently without being signed?

"Well yes," Uricoli concedes. "We had to and yet we really wanted to make it work. We flew to Vancouver and wrote three songs 'Saving Grace', 'Hungover You' and 'England's Best', then finished the demo and flew home. Brian then made everything happen. He went to one of his contacts who loved the songs and it went from there to the label signing us. It wasn't instant, there was this eight month period where nothing happened. I'd left my job, prematurely in hindsight, but I learnt a lot."

Capitol records signed Stellar Revival before they returned to Vancouver to complete the album.

"The whole record deal thing, working with Brian, was the most incredible experience of my life," the bassist continues. "We moved up to Vancouver and we had loads of songs and riffs but Brian added small bits to the songs which changed them from good to perfect, that's his gift. He really is magical. I was in awe."

Stellar Revival's star should have been on the rise?

"Initially the label was hyped," he remembers. "Everyone knew that we had a great set of songs but the release date just kept being pushed back and I just don't know what the strategy was. Maybe they wanted us to ramp us up a bit more. An earlier release would have changed it. We changed our management and ended up in limbo for a while and before we knew it Capitol was being swallowed up by Universal. We had a half a million dollar deal all in, including a publishing deal and a record deal. It really was one of the very last big major label deals that a band ever got."

Album delays are a symptom of label restructuring.

"We we were in limbo," the bassist reminisces regrettably. "Phone calls went unanswered, no one called us back. I'd given up everything to do this. We changed our manager, who'd dealt with the Jonas Brothers, Backstreet Boys and Justin Timberlake, he liked us but got tied up with the release of Timberlake's 20/20 album whilst we just sat staring at the wall. The label never contacted us."

Common courtesy should have been the order of the day?

"Well, all things conspired against us," he continues. "The management couldn't really do anything because the label weren't calling back. It was bad timing."

Clearly there was no option to walk away from Capitol?

"We were under contract," Uricoli explains. "What we should have done is play shows and write new songs to send to new labels. The sitting around killed us. There's no one to blame specifically. We changed manager again and he said that it was impossible to sell a band that doesn't play; we missed a trick. A lawyer got involved with our manager to try and get us the record back and also a guy who knew the son of the CEO at Capitol (Joe Smith) said that he would try and get us the record back through him. It was a two pronged attack. We were broke by now, due to poor management as it all went over budget. Amazingly, we got a call from the label saying that we could have the record as long as they could have a three percent override. Unbelievable."

That was in July 2012 and still it took a further three years to finally release it.

"Our manager couldn't sell us," the bassist remembers. "We had a band meeting, one of the band members bailed and we called it a day. The whole thing got to him; it got to me too, but I never wanted to quit, it ran deep. I mean I'd been friends with them since I was thirteen years old. It had moved on through lawyers - that was the last time I spoke to him - I went into hiding because I was embarrassed and my whole world crumbled into nothing."

So you then sat on the album for two years after you'd retrieved it from Capitol?

"Yeah," Uricoli snaps. "It was water under the bridge, with no band it wasn't important anymore. Ryan and I said that we thought it was a waste of talent and we needed to do something with it and then we had some discussion about girls not being able to handle southern gentlemen and that was when we had the idea that we should move forward as Southern Gentlemen.

Southern Gentlemen is a cut off point, time to move on.

"Yeah!" the bassist agrees. "They're two separate things, you can't forget what we did; I mean Stellar Revival was my life from the age of thirteen. But we owed it to them to give them the album."

Stellar Revival played Download in 2012 and 'The Crazy Ones' had piqued everyone's interest.

"It was all lightning in a bottle," Uricoli offers. "Playing without an album was odd, the label played too hard with this theory. Even before the label was sold there was I thought to release it as summer record, but the delay meant that we missed the boat. It's really emotional and I don't mind saying that."

'Love Lust & Bad Company' was finally released by the band themselves.

"We decided to release the Southern Gentlemen song 'If You Just Believe' first," Uricoli states. "I didn't want Southern

Gentleman to be about Stellar Revival and after checking ownership rights we released the Stellar Revival album for the fans. Some of them had bought pre-sales and of course they never received the album. So if anyone has proof of purchase, send it to me on Facebook or the Southern Gentlemen website and I'll send them the album as a download."

What's new with Southern Gentleman?

"It's really just Ryan (Spears) and I," The bassist admits. "Andrew (Koussevitzky) our drummer got married and lives in Los Angeles, Steve (Morgan) and I are still buddies and talk. Ryan does all the singing, we didn't want another singer. He's taken lessons. Stellar vocalist Rino (Cerbone) didn't want to do it anymore and I haven't got a clue what he's up to now."

Cerbone's departure ran deep and it's unsurprising that his voice is tinged with a sad timbre of disappointment.

"Well Rino was part of the magic of the band," he explains emotionally. "He was a great performer and a great entertainer as well as being a great singer. But our music is in the same lane - we love all Shinedown and Theory so we won't be straying too far. Sound wise, it's a a little different playing in your garage again after working with Brian Howes. There's more of a country aspect to the music; Southern Gentlemen won't lose the radio friendliness.

"I'd work with Brian again with Southern Gentleman, I'd jump at it. I'm still in touch, I've sent him stuff; of course he tells me it sucks and I go back to the drawing board. We'd definitely work with someone of his ilk though."

Is it a case of once bitten twice shy as far as a major label goes?

"You would approach with caution," he intimates. "I would go into it with my eyes wider and with more business law acumen. I've got better people now. An independent label with people who love the band would work too. We want longevity for our band and that's what's always counted."

SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN

OZONE

Steve Overland and Chris Ousey are two names that will summon up wonderful memories for many of you reading these hallowed pages. They've written some of the songs of our lives and for the first time ever, these men have joined together, along with guitar wizard Mike Slamer, to record an album called 'Self Defence', a masterpiece featuring twelve tracks that utilise their combined, extraordinary vocal talents. The band itself is called Ozone and Ian Johnson talked with Steve and Chris about what it was like working together...

How did Ozone come about… whose idea was it for the two of you to get together? Was it something you both always wanted to do?

SO: The whole idea is down to Khalil and Barrie over at Escape. They've always wanted to see what the two of us together would sound like. Of course, we've known about each other and played on the same bills together over the years but Khalil especially wanted to see if we could come up with an album that had a kind of Purple/Whitesnake/Coverdale/Hughes sound to it, although it's been tough to get the time to do it. Both Chris and I are very busy with other things, lots of commitments to other bands and projects, so it's been a long old road to get us to this place. Of course we had to get together in a studio to see if our voices could actually work together, so we did one track and it just worked, everything gelled. Happily, even though we're totally different kinds of singers, with different ranges and vocal tones, everything sounded great when we sang together. So now we're here with Ozone and we're both very excited with what we've come up with.

CO: I've been a big fan of FM and Steve's vocals for many years so it was a no brainer for me really.

What I like about the album is that in the strictest sense it isn't a duets album. Instead you trade lines and verses whilst sharing the choruses and backing vocals. Was this always the intention to do it this way instead of just singing everything together?

SO: Yes it was, well spotted mate. It's again that Coverdale/Hughes thing where one of them would sing a couple of lines, then the other, and then they'd share the chorus. On 'Self Defence' you'll find a couple of songs that are mainly me or mainly Chris but for the most part we shared everything. Chris and I are so pleased with how it turned out.

CO: Yeah, we didn't want the thing to sound too staged, if you know what I mean. It really just came down to who of us injected the right feel on the various parts of each song.

You mentioned that you both have very distinctive and recognisable vocal styles but did either of you have to change the way you sing to accommodate the other?

SO: No, everything just gelled. Basically the whole idea was for us just to sing the way we sing. So what you get is a Chris Ousey vocal and a Steve Overland vocal, we didn't want to change anything. It was more about how our two voices could complement each other than anything else. Tonally, because my voice is so different from Chris', we found almost right away that we could blend our styles together and get a great sound while doing so. So when we were recording all we had to do was for Chris to sing it like Chris and me to sing it like me (laughs) and it just worked.

The band behind you is basically Seventh Key with Tommy Denander playing guitar as well. Did you and Chris have any input into who was going to play on the album? If so, was Mike Slamer, Billy Greer and so on

your personal choice?

SO: Actually Mike's been involved with Ozone from the start and he has a group of musicians he loves to work with, so that is how the band came about. Mike also did all the pre-production for the album. Of course when the idea for the Ozone album was first floated to us by Khalil and he said he'd like Mike to work with us, we both said yes straight away. Mike Slamer is a wonderful musician, a great player and a really superb producer so both Chris and I were very happy with his involvement, who wouldn't be? He put one of the tracks together and sent it to us and after we heard it we just said yeah, that's it; Mike's just got that touch.

How did you write the songs for the album? Did you each bring something to the table and join them together or did Mike do the bulk of the writing?

SO: Mike brought a few rough backing tracks and demos to the table, then Chris and I shared them out, took them away and worked on them. I think we had about six each. A couple weren't even supposed to be on the album, they were just great songs that we liked but after playing around with them they ended up fitting nicely on the album. What's nice about doing it that way is that when you finally get to hear what the other person has come up with, you sit back and say "Bloody Hell, that's a great track you know!" When we brought the songs to the studio – let's say something like 'Let The Good Will Out' – we'd work out the vocal arrangements together and then decide how we would share the vocal lines. So this time around how we did things was done in a whole different way from the usual way of we write.

CO: Steve and I contributed around the same amount of material for the record and Mike sent lots of stuff over as well, and we worked on the musical ideas that inspired us the most. We were both aware of the progress of the other so we could always make sure we were all heading in the roughly the same direction.

Having the three of you on the album and because you're all Brits, has given Ozone a very classic British Rock sound. Was that what you were aiming for?

SO: Totally, I'm so glad you noticed that. That was our benchmark, to make a retro sounding Purple/Whitesnake etcetera, Rock album. We set out to try to do something different from FM, Heartland, Seventh Key. We wanted to make – and Chris and I spoke about this at the very start of Ozone – a proper sounding British Rock album. Mike really got that right from the get go and was up for it, so you'll find lots of Hammond organ and a raw 70s Rock feel that we tried to put into all the songs.

CO: I don't personally write with any big vision of where the thing will sit when it's finished. Having said that, I'm not surprised it has an overriding British feel. We all three of us, Steve, myself and Mike, grew up exposed to the same music and were all influenced by pretty much the same bands and that tends to stay with you over the years.

The new album has a song called 'Evolve' on it which features your late friend Christain Wolff on guitars and keyboards. Was this both a sad moment but also a happy one?

SO: It was. It was so sad when Christian passed away but I'm now trawling through boxes of demos and tapes I've got, looking for stuff I did with Christian. One day, if I get enough stuff together, I'd like to do an album dedicated to him because he was a really nice guy; a great writer and player. So yes, it was sad but also great to be able to use something of his on this album, because it keeps his legacy alive.

Each time I've played the album I've found myself liking a different song. Do you have a favourite or is it too close to call for you?

"We found almost right away that we could blend our styles together and get a great sound while doing so. So when we were recording all we had to do was for Chris to sing it like Chris and me to sing it like me and it just worked."

STEVE OVERLAND

SO: I think you do change favourites when you listen to it. For me it's a bit different because I don't listen to the stuff I've done a lot. I play it a few times but not repetitively, so last week in the car I was listening to the CD and I loved 'So Blind', which I think is a great ballad, or 'Destiny', or 'Tiger By The Tale' which I think is a really quirky song. When I play it next week that could and probably will all change. That I think is what makes a good album, where you've got enough great songs on it to have different favourites at different times. If you have an album with one great song on it, one that everyone fixates on, then what you've got there is a standout track and an OK album. I'd rather have ten or twelve great songs, than one great track.

CO: Yeah, my favourites tend to chop and change too! I like Steve's performances a lot, especially on the verses in 'So Blind' and I'm a sucker for the driving vibe of 'Visionary Man'. I think 'Self Defence' stands up very well also.

Any chance of Ozone touring?

SO: Never say never, although people are still waiting to see Shadowman and Overland tour! (laughs) Trouble is with FM on the road supporting 'Heroes and Villains', it would be tough to get out there with Ozone, the time just isn't there at the moment. Last weekend FM were at a festival with Thunder and I got talking to Chris and Howie about how we've done four Shadowman albums but not played one gig in support of them. They told me off about that and said it's about time we became a real-life touring band. In the end though it's all down to having the time.

CO: I think it would undoubtedly be a great record to perform live, alongside some of the songs from our solo records maybe. I guess we'll have to wait and see how the record's received before we make that call and if we have the time.

Will Ozone be an ongoing thing? It would be a real shame if this was just a one off.

SO: I totally agree. I loved working with Chris and Mike and the response to the album has been incredible, so I have no problem doing another one. I love doing different things working with different people because that keeps everything fresh, makes you a better musician and helps you to not stagnate or just do the same old stuff all the time. It may sound strange but I don't want to be just known as that bloke who sings in FM. Don't get me wrong, FM are the best, I love the band and everyone associated with it but I like to try other things, which I always put 100% of myself into. It's about learning new things and working with different people, and that is something I want to do and even after all my years in the business I'm still learning and loving it.

What's next then for the two of you?

SO: Well funnily enough, last night I was in the studio finishing off the new Shadowman album, which we all think is the best one we've done. There's going to be a new Overland as well and of course all the FM stuff I'm doing, so it's a busy old time, but that's great because at my time of life I don't want the phone to stop ringing! (laughs)

CO: I'm just about ready for my second solo record I think. We have most of the songs written so I'll be moving forward with that in the not too distant future. Also we're just about ready to go into the studio for Snakecharmer's next record and we're tidying up and mixing a live recording to be released in time for some Snakecharmer dates here and in Europe in November. So it's never a dull moment and all that!

GLENN HUGHES

Legendary vocalist Glenn Hughes is prepareing to undertake an epic world tour, promising to play selections from his amazing career, covering Trapeze, Deep Purple, Black Country Communion and his sprawling solo work. To make the idea even more appealing, none other than former Whitesnake guitarist Doug Aldrich will handle guitar duties. James Gaden talked to Glenn to hear more…

What have you been up to in the last few months?

Well, I've been planning on getting back to my original life, which is Glenn Hughes solo. It's very apparent to people like you, who are fans of my music and my friend, you know exactly what I've been doing for the last ten years. I've been making records with Chad Smith, working with Tony Iommi doing 'Fused', I did Black Country Communion and the band broke up… then wait a minute! He's got a new band with Jason Bonham… and that broke up too. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to think "Surely Glenn, who is now in his sixties, should stick to the Glenn Hughes brand". What I'm trying to get to James, is I love working with new guys, famous guys, friends… but I have a strict pedigree of things I want to do, I work to deadlines, I'm a workaholic and I write so much music. When something goes wrong, and you're in a band and you are the focal point, the one who does interviews, people think "Oh, it's Hughesy, it's gone wrong again." I decided, when I left California Breed, that I would return to being a solo artist. I'll still play with Kings Of Chaos of course, but I think for the rest of my life I'll be a solo artist, with my brand. I'm about to start a world tour in a couple of weeks, in South America, and James, this is the biggest world tour I've ever done in my entire life.

I've seen the amount of shows you've booked, it's a staggering amount to commit to. You're playing everywhere, you're back in Japan where you haven't been for ages…

I haven't played there for fifteen years. Y'know, I'll do an American tour next spring, I'll be back in Europe in April, late May and June is festival season in Europe so I'll be doing those, then I'm off to Malaysia and Australia. I'll be on the road basically from August 2015 to October 2016. Right now, we're looking at that and things can change in the Rock N' Roll business, but I don't think I've ever said to anyone, *ever*, that I wanted to do something like this. I reckon I've got ten years left of doing the live thing, in Rock at least, and I've got the greatest manager in the world, a great agent, a great team of people around me – it's a new group and they're encouraging me to go for it. The global response has been overwhelming. I've got to tell you the truth, I really dug being in Black Country but you and I spoke about why the band broke up. I love Joe Bonamassa, he's a good friend, but he just didn't want to play shows with BCC. I don't want to be in the situation again where I can't play because somebody else can't commit, so I'm running my own thing and surrounding myself with friends to tour the planet! I've had such a great career, I've come back from drugs, from alcohol, I had open heart surgery and almost died, we haven't discussed that but that was scary and I came back from that.

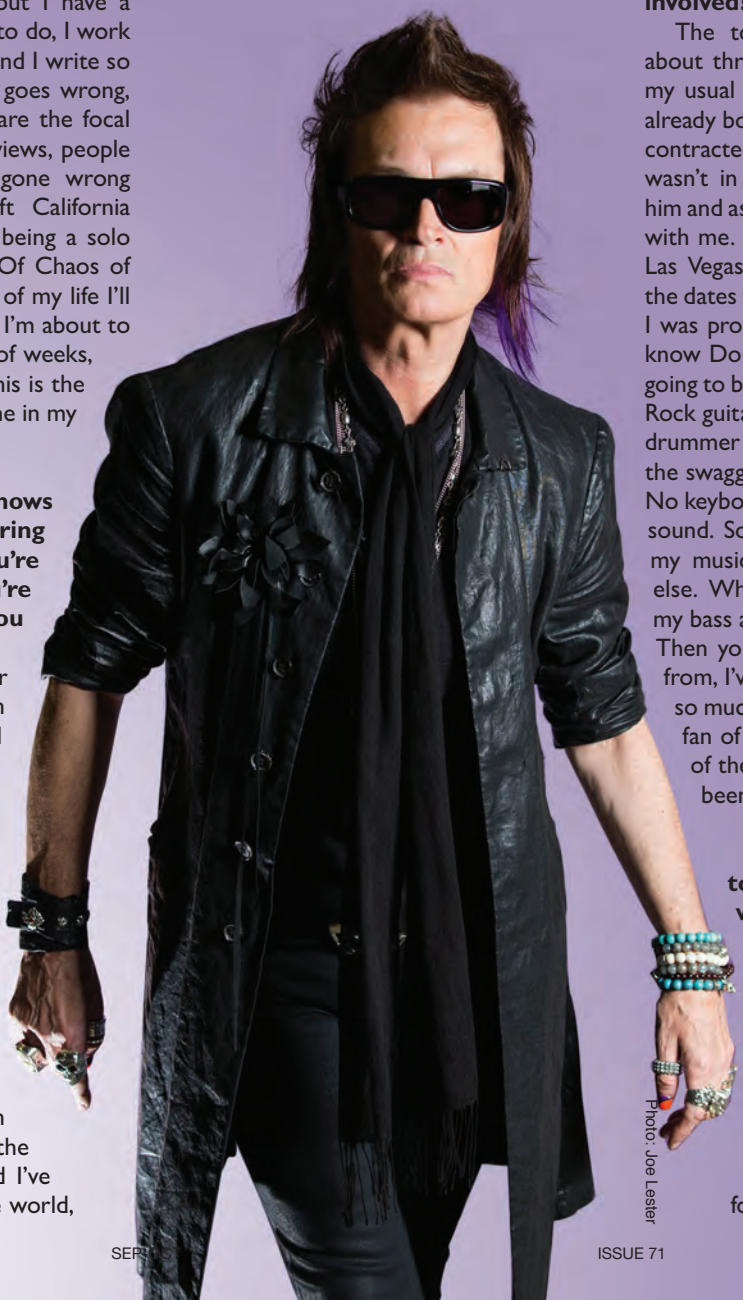

Photo: Joe Lester

I've been a fan of you as a solo artist first and foremost anyway, so I'm delighted you're back doing your thing. I was disappointed California Breed didn't go further, but if it means you're back solo, I'm happy with that.

You're the first person I've spoken to in the UK about this… when Jason left Cali Breed, he left right after we were announced as support for Slash and Alter Bridge and the tickets were on sale. People were buying those tickets and for some reason, Jason didn't want to tour. I said to myself that I couldn't disband Breed, because people had bought tickets and we were advertised. So I stayed and I actually handed my notice in four months before we finished up. I knew after those shows, I'd be finished. It wasn't the same without Jason. It was just me and Andrew Watt out front, who is a very talented guy, but an unknown. I thought people would want to see me solo, so I figured I'd get out, get a new agent, new manager and it's been very easy to march forward.

The other major attraction to your huge solo tour is having Doug Aldrich as your guitar player. How did he get involved?

The tour started to be put together about three months ago, but unfortunately, my usual guitar player Soren Anderson had already booked himself on a tour and he was contracted and not available. I knew Doug wasn't in Whitesnake anymore, so I called him and asked if he fancied doing some shows with me. He said "Absolutely!" He's busy in Las Vegas at the moment but he could do the dates from August through to Christmas. I was proud to announce him and now you know Doug is coming out, you know this is going to be a ROCK show. Doug is an intense Rock guitar player, it's a trio with Pontus, my drummer from Gothenburg. It's going to be the swaggery Rock Glenn, that sort of style. No keyboards, back to more like the Trapeze sound. Sometimes when I put keyboards in my music, it starts to become something else. When it's the organic mix of drums, my bass and a Les Paul, it's more aggressive. Then you think of the songs I can choose from, I've written about 400 songs. There's so much to choose from and Doug is a big fan of my work, and I love him, he's one of the nicest guys in the business, so it's been a long time coming.

How on earth are you going to settle on a set list, when you want to cover stuff from all over your career?

I think I've got the setlist, I'll do bits and pieces from Trapeze and Deep Purple, some BCC stuff, a Cali Breed song and some solo songs, 'Soul Mover' kind of stuff. It'll be a set heavy on Rock stuff. Doug is a Hard Rock player and a good foil for me. I've been trying for years to get back to a trio, you

could see that's where I was heading with Cali Breed.

Will it be a set list that changes?

Not really, it'll stay much the same because we rehearse next week. I wrote down 40 songs and I will choose about fifteen from those. I've got an idea what I'm doing and I plan on doing a couple I haven't done in *years*, which are important to me. I'll definitely tip my hat to Trapeze on this thing. I've changed direction a lot, but this is a trio, it's organic, it aggressive and it's ROCK. I think you'll agree with what I'm doing, James. I will play some Purple stuff. People have said for years about MK III getting together, it can't happen now Jon Lord is gone. David Coverdale has done Purple stuff recently, but I can honestly say I've never lost sleep over the fact MK III didn't ever get back together.

There was the next best thing, when you joined Whitesnake on stage a few weeks back and sang with David.

Yeah, I went simply to give David a hug, and he gave me a microphone! He said "Let's do this!" We wrote the songs, and I'd have liked to have rehearsed them, but I went out and it was very respectful, to be on his stage and in front of his fans. There was a lot of emotion there. David and I have been very close for 40 something years. It was nice to do that, but I'm happy living in the moment.

Will you record any of these solo shows, as Doug is with you?

I take recording stuff with me on pretty much every show and I film stuff, so it's possible. Maybe not on these dates, maybe the ones next year, as I'll be on the road for a year. Tell everyone in the UK it's been too long, I can't wait to come back and play a good ol' Rock N' Roll show for you all!

GLENN HUGHES UK TOUR 2015

Saturday 17th Oct
Southampton, Engine Rooms
Monday 19th Oct
Norwich, Waterfront
Tuesday 20th Oct
Newcastle, Tyne Theatre
Thursday 22nd Oct
Belfast, Limelight
Friday 23rd Oct
Glasgow, The Garage
Sunday 25th Oct
Holmfirth, Picturedrome
Monday 26th Oct
Bilston, - Robin 2
Wednesday 28th
York, Fibbers
Thursday 29th
Manchester, Club Academy
Sunday 1st
London, – Electric Ballroom

Further info: www.glennhughes.com

JARED JAMES NICHOLS

Supporting Glenn Hughes on his UK tour is newcomer Jared James Nichols, a fiery guitar player/vocalist with a superb debut album 'Old Glory And The Wild Revival' out now. James Gaden spoke to Jared. Photo by Laurence Harvey.

Tell me about the title 'Old Glory And The Wild Revival'. Is that a nod to the sound of the album? It's not really a throwback, but it does have a lot of Hendrix in there and there are a lot of Classic Rock influences from the 70s.

It's actually got two meanings – it totally refers to that, because the sound, like you said, that I want to build on is that 70s sleazy Classic Rock sound, with some Blues. It also comes from 'Old Glory' which is a guitar a bought, a 1950s Les Paul. I bought it from a guy who really needed the money, and I got it the day we started recording. The whole record was done with that one guitar. I called it 'Old Glory', it's so beat up and trashed, it reminded me that the guitar had played so much great music, it had basically had been on tour it's whole life. And the 'Wild Revival' is taking this music to a new level, it's not dead. As long as people are playing it, it's alive.

I really liked the superb balance of Blues, Classic Rock and hooks in your songs, it's such a great mix.

Thanks man! Before I wrote those songs, I was busy worrying what I was going to do on the record. Then I realized I should just write stuff I think is cool, and that's what I did, so to hear from a guy like you who hears new music all the time that you're into it, that's great. It gives me hope for the future, because I've almost got another record written!

You got Eddie Kramer on board for production as well, which was something of a coup, what was he like?

I got lucky, all the old Zeppelin and Hendrix stuff, Eddie had a hand in those. I'm a big Hendrix fan and about two years ago, I met a friend who said Eddie was a friend of his, and that he thought Eddie should produce me. I thought "No way, that'll never happen!" Then I played a gig at the Viper Room in L.A. and Eddie came to see me! Fast forward to preparing to make this record and he calls me on the phone, out of the blue. We started talking, went for coffee and he said he wasn't in it for money, he was there because he heard something in the music that he wanted to help build on. To have him say that really meant everything, it meant he wanted to help me make the best music I could. A few days later we were cutting 'Haywire', swapping ideas – he brought in Jonathan Hoover on drums who played with Joe Satriani, just because he was a friend of Eddie's. We cut 'Haywire', 'Crazy', then we did 'Playin' For Keeps', a whole bunch of stuff. To sit and watch Eddie work was just unreal. I learned more in two weeks about recording than I had picked up in my whole life.

The album has a lot of energy. I'm guessing you didn't overdub much?

Oh yeah, the biggest thing is take it off the floor. Go for the first take, the live experience. Everything I do is playing live with the band. All the greatest records were about the performance, the energy, the feeling, not whether it was perfectly in tune or whatever. Eddie was great for that, we didn't use a click track or any of that shit, just kept it real and live. On 'Now Or Never' and 'Get Down', those songs just have one guitar and a vocal, cut at the same time. No trickery or overdubs, just straight Rock N' Roll.

Saying about vocals, it says on your promo sheet you sang out of necessity. I thought you sang great, but you didn't consider yourself a singer?

You got that right man, I was never thinking about that, but nobody else wanted to! About three years ago, I came to L.A. to start my own band. I thought about hiring a singer but there was the thought of that lead singer bullshit, other people's ideas, so I just worked hard, I still work my voice every day. We just did like 66 dates in Europe and my voice is getting better, so that's exciting. If you come to see me on the Hughes tour, you'll probably think the songs sound better live than on the record.

How did you get hooked up with supporting Glenn?

I've been gigging since I was fifteen and the first gig I played in London was this past April. There was a guy there from a booking agency and right after the set he comes up to me, said "I love what you do, I want to book some gigs for you!" I said "Great!", put him in touch with my manager and about ten minutes later I was told I would be opening for Glenn Hughes. I love Glenn so it'll be a real treat to fire things up for him!

Read more from Jared in the full length interview on Rocktopia.

There are some different sounds on it this album; the band have not wandered too far away from their core but kept us keen.

"I think the first three songs spell out how we've kept the classic sound at certain moments and how we've branched out a bit. 'Minion' has a heaviness to it that could be seen as a new direction. Al (Morse, guitars) and Ryo (Okumoto, keys) always have a way of bringing variety to the sonic palette. "We didn't necessarily set out to explore new ground, but a lot of the material on the album ended up that way out of not wanting to repeat ourselves."

This is not a concept album, that would be too obvious, too much conforming to a genre that Spock's Beard lead, not follow. But there is a theme based around one of the most interesting songs in the album.

"It's not a concept album but the title and artwork for the album comes from a story that the song 'Bennett Built A Time Machine' is based on," Leonard explains. "That story is printed in the liner notes. There really is no other tie between songs:

"'Bennett Built a Time Machine' - A mad scientist, apparently schizophrenic living in his own world discovers what he calls 'The Oblivion Particle'. Instead of using it for the good of mankind, he decides to use it to travel back in time to change the outcome of his life. As for the others –

'Get Out While You Can' – Someone wrestling with the past, haunted by demons they can't seem to shake.

'A Better Way To Fly' – A wealthy man convinced there's more to life than being stuck on the ground amid material possessions.

'To Be Free Again' – A mysterious cult recruits followers by promising eternal life without the problems of earthly concerns.

'Disappear' – Dropping out of an overwhelming and generally oppressive society. Going off the grid in a major way.

'Minion' – Escaping an oppressive relationship

'Hell's Not Enough' – A lash out at cult leaders and the like who manipulate the weak minded."

We're used to hearing Ted Leonard's dulcet tones on the albums of the Beard, but now we have a new voice to enjoy, drummer Jimmy Keegan has stepped up to the mic, perhaps to fill in on a short day, perhaps to fulfil a long held ambition.

"Jimmy was interested in singing more on this album which worked out really well. Besides backing vocals throughout, he sang lead on the song 'Bennett Built A Time Machine' and one section of 'To Be Free Again'."

And it's lovely to hear David Ragsdale too.

"John Boegehold met Rags (pre-Kansas) at a music store in L.A. he and Dave Meros worked in back in the late 1980s. They did a little recording and talked about putting some kind of a group together but that didn't go too far since he got the Kansas gig shortly thereafter. They kept in touch and when John started writing with Spock's Beard, they talked about having Rags do a guest appearance, first on 'X' then 'BNaDS' ('Brief Nocturnes And Dreamless Sleep') but there was always a problem with scheduling. Finally it worked out for 'The Oblivion Particle'. He recorded his violin parts for the song 'Disappear' from his home studio between Kansas gigs."

Of course, Spock's Beard have shown understanding of the direction the business is heading in by funding their 'X' album from fan pay. Great to see enlightened views of the crushing business model and it must alleviate pressure.

"The pressure level is about the same as it has always been. A lot of the work is done separately since not everyone lives in the L.A. area. The drums as well as some guitar, keys and vocals were recorded at The Mouse House with the rest recorded at band members' home studios. Rich Mouser has been the engineer since the early days and more recently a co-producer. He's great at what he does and understands the band so it's a good fit."

They are known for striking album artwork and 'The Oblivion Particle' is no different. Seen from over the shoulder of a gent in his shed facing steampunk dials with a warm glow emanating from his centre – a group shot sneering at the camera and flipping the bird it ain't.

"Thomas Ewerhard who works with InsideOut is the artist. With one exception, he's done the graphic design on every Spock's Beard album since 'Day For Night'.

"I don't think anyone had a specific idea of what the album should've been when we started. The ultimate sound grew out of the songs we came up with."

The Beard is out there! It looks like it's out at Nottingham, Leamington Spa, Islington, Glasgow, Manchester in September and October. It will be great to see them and see what lovely little curveballs that set list brings.

"Most of the time simple logistics and profitability determine where we play. The song choice is definitely a challenge with twelve albums to choose from. Ryo takes the reins with this but we all chime in."

If Genesis are the granddaddies and Knifeworld are the meth smoking wide eyed desolation angels of the modern day (which of course they aren't), Spock's Beard could certainly lay claim to Prog Patriarchy.

"Thanks for making us feel old!" the singer laughs. "I'm pretty sure the patriarch title would still be reserved for the likes of Yes, Genesis, Kansas, etc… We will continue to climb over the mountain of other Prog bands' discarded skeletons using their empty eye sockets for toe-holds on our way to universal Prog domination!"

And Spock's Beard continue to cut a swathe through the competition, using those empty eye sockets and discarded skulls in their climb to perfection. Or Oblivion. Wherever comes first. My money's on the former.

SPOCK'S BEARD

"There are those who believe that our tinkering will be the death of us. We just cannot stop feeding our voracious appetites, which is sucking the life out of the planet and our brinkmanship of Mutually Assured Destruction with weapons is a playground game which could kill us all. Oblivion is close to us all, a slip away," some say.

That infernal tinkering is something Spock's Beard are used to. They have changed it up, growing stronger after Neal Morse left the band and bringing in new members to change things up, plus accessing new ways to fund their output. New album 'The Oblivion Particle' is the same but different, a wing spreading exercise which is glorious from start to finish. Ted Leonard spoke to Steve Swift about the changes, the album and Spock's Beard's place in the world.

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BRUCE KULICK

Bruce Kulick is probably best known for his excellent, varied contributions to the unmasked KISS catalogue and his underrated Union with one-time Mötley Crüe and current The Dead Daisies frontman John Corabi. However, long before Bruce got Gene and Paul out of a hole by replacing the ailing Mark St. John in KISS, even a few years prior to the hugely talented guitarist having stints alongside both Michael Bolton and Billy Squier, three young New Yorkers dreamt of making the big time. Bruce along with drummer Guy Bois and bassist/singer Mike Katz hit the recording studio back in 1974, with the trio putting together an amazingly accomplished set of songs.

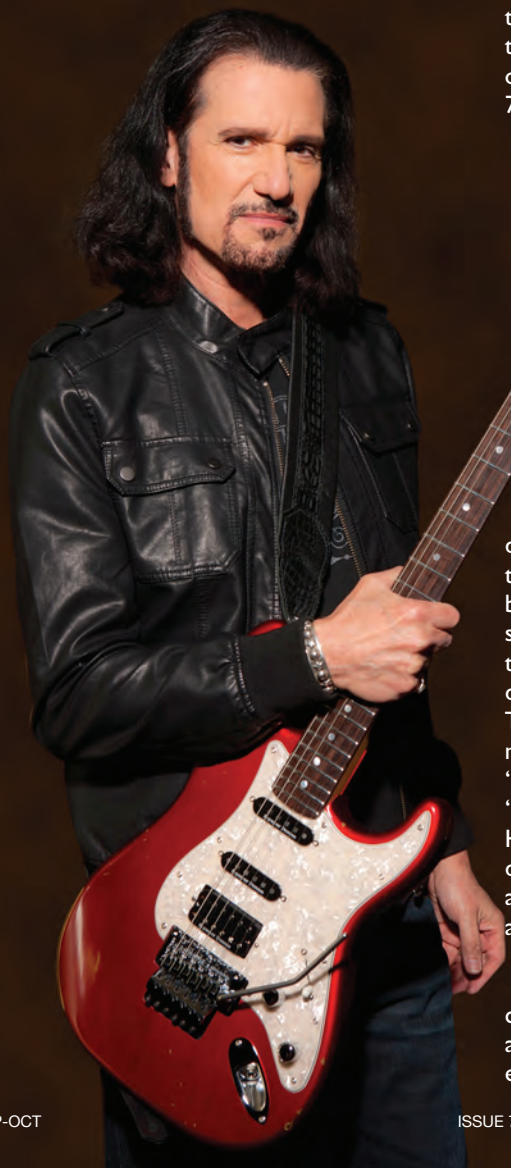
However for reasons even the members of KKB can't quite remember, they never took those dreams any further. Until 2008 that is, when Kulick released the heavily Cream inspired music the trio created for his many fans to finally hear. A recent chance discovery by Katz of the original master-tapes has given KKB the opportunity to remaster their songs and add, over forty years after the threesome first recorded together, a superb new track, 'Got To Get Back', from which this new release takes its name. Fireworks' Steven Reid spoke with the long-serving Grand Funk Railroad guitarist and solo artist Bruce Kulick about why he and his bandmates from yesteryear had 'Got To Get Back'…

"Meeting Mike Katz, who lived on my block in Queens, was really fortunate in my opinion. Here is a guy who loved the same bands that I do, and played and sang and could write songs. Bass is his primary instrument, loving Jack Bruce, who also was a hero of mine," Bruce reminisces. "With me being the Eric Clapton lover, it was a good friendship for musical magic. Guy Bois, the drummer, lived about five blocks away. He also was into Cream and bands we loved. So with us all living close, it was easy for us to get together at Guy's basement to rehearse these original songs. Except for one co-write from me, the other five songs came from Mike's brain, and some very catchy and complicated tunes they were. It's been great to revisit them! Back then, we didn't play any live gigs, instead there was lots of rehearsals to get the songs tight before we recorded them. The recording studio was nice, and the people working there loved what we were trying to capture. I don't remember much else, except we did not leave till the six songs were done and tight performances were captured. Looking back, I can't figure out why we didn't get a manager, or try to contact a label for this music to be released back then!"

2008 saw the release of the extremely limited 'KKB 1974', where the six tracks the trio recorded were aired to the public in their original form, but not from a top-notch sound source. However with Mike Katz unearthing the long thought lost original tapes, he, Bois and Kulick have had the chance to hone those vintage recordings and present them in the style originally intended, if not better.

"It's night and day," Bruce says clearly excited by the results. "I am not embarrassed by the 'KKB 1974' release, the mixes were good, and the Pro-tools transfer worked out well, but it wasn't possible to put a vocal effect on the voice, or clean up some of the age matters from my original reel to reel recording. In fact I didn't know until recently that the studio never would of given me a copy of what we did on the 'Radio Shack' tape we originally used for 'KKB 1974'; that was cheap tape! I made the copy from Mike's master, I am sure. Finding the original tracks on quality tape made a huge difference for me sonically and getting them mixed by Brian Virtue here in LA was a blessing."

However the title track on the release is actually a new song specifically written and recorded for this release…



"It started with the discovery of the original tracks," Bruce confirms. "Mike and I discussed the opportunity and I felt strongly about a new song. Why not? Challenging? Sure! But I had a song with a riff that I felt was KKB related. Mike took it and turned it upside down, and inside out and took that idea, turning it into a wonderful Pop tune that really is a throw back to 1974. We had to record where we all lived, so with Guy in France, Mike in New York, and me in LA; modern recording makes that easy. I do love the song and it fits perfectly as the lead off track." And on that Bruce is 100% correct, the title track from 'Got To Get Back' one of the most memorable slices of vintage, 70s inspired Rock 2015 has produced.

"This year has been busy with KKB 'Got To Get Back', as well as the BK3 [fittingly Bruce's third solo album] vinyl release," Bruce details when quizzed on his 2015 plans. "But I am also working on song ideas for another solo disc." Although the ever busy guitarist explains that may not be as easy as it sounds due to his other commitments. "Every year, and this is the 15th year of doing dates with Grand Funk Railroad, I am traveling the country for shows with the band. It is hard to fit in other travels but sometimes I do. I recently had a wonderful two weeks in Australia this past March, doing clinics, gigs and a KISS expo there. The fans really appreciate my era of no makeup KISS music. Albums like 'Asylum', 'Crazy Nights' and especially 'Revenge' and 'Carnival Of Souls' are all fan favourites. However it's easier for the current KISS to do the classic KISS tracks. I can't beg Paul and Gene to do more of my era songs, after all, that would be silly!"

Visit www.kulick.net to pick up your copy of 'Got To Get Back' which comes as a numbered, strictly limited CD with an exclusive picture card and plectrum.

Edge Of The Blade are a new British powerhouse trio who play a dark and brooding style of Melodic Metal. The band features ex-Shy and After Hours members Alan Kelly and John Francis respectively, who are joined by guitarist and producer Andrew Chick. Ian Johnson talks with Alan and John about the new album, how they got together and more besides.

Please tell us a little bit about Edge Of The Blade, how did you all get together?

Alan: John asked me if I had any spare songs that he could use on a project he was working on with Andrew Chick, so I sent them over fourteen or fifteen songs. They worked on my songs and they also sent me some of theirs to work on, and out of that Edge Of The Blade was born.

John: I've know and worked with Andrew for years, working together in various bands. We were working on ideas for a solo album when I suggested contacting musicians I'd worked with previously to see if they would contribute a song to the album. Alan was the first person I contacted… and the last. (laughs)

Where does the name Edge Of The Blade come from?

Alan: The name comes from a Journey song title, I was amazed to find that it wasn't being used as a band name already. Edge Of The Blade seemed to work for us so we settled on that.

John: I'm a big Journey and Steve Perry fan anyway, so I loved it.

The names Alan Kelly and John Francis are well know in the Melodic Rock world, as you've both been involved with bands like Shy and After Hours. Yet the 'The Ghosts Of Humans' is a much heavier album than I was expecting it to be. Was this a deliberate thing, to move away from the more melodic music you're known for, or was this just the way the tracks turned out during the writing sessions?

John: Andrew is a big Metal head so when we were putting the songs together that's how they were turning out. Alan and myself had to calm them down a bit, Alan is a genius when it comes to 'block harmonies' and Andrew just told me to go for it.

Alan: I was definitely trying to write heavier songs but without a doubt it is Andrew's influence on the songs that brings the modern heavy approach that makes this album stand out and it definitely brings something new to the table.

There's a darkness to the album and its songs but there's also lot's of melodies running through the music. Was the song writing a collaborative affair, with all three of you working together or did you each bring individual parts of songs to the table and then put them together?

John: The songs turned out like that because we work so well as a team. Yes they are dark, because we wanted to try something different; a fresh start so to speak, for Alan and myself anyway, Andrew is more that way inclined already let's say. (laughs)

Alan: A lot of the songs were already written before this project began but it is everyone's input that has shaped them into what they are and the heavy approach coupled with the melodic influences really make for something new and exiting.

The darkness I mentioned is also evident in the great cover artwork. Did you have input into that aspect of things?

Alan: The cover was designed by Alex Cooper and I really like his work, I happened to be working with him on a different project when I mentioned what I was doing with John and Andrew. Alex loved the name of the band and the title of the album and was inspired to come up with that cover within only a few hours of my mentioning it to him. He sent it over to me and said "what do you think of this?" …I knew we had to use it if the opportunity came up, and luckily it did.

I love all of the songs on the album but especially 'Believer', 'The Taken', the title track and 'Promised Land' because they are never what you think they're going to be when you listen to them. Each has its own individuality and personality.

John: I'll let you into a secret, I'm a very contented person at the moment, the way all the songs have turned out is pretty special for me personally.

Alan: Without doubt to me, this is the best project I have been involved with since Shy's 'Excess All Areas'. That is how highly I rate this album. I am very proud to be part of it.

One song that I haven't mentioned is 'River Runs Red', which in my review I say is one of my tracks of 2015. What can you tell us about it?

Alan: Awesome stuff Ian, thanks! I wrote the lyrics for this track and it's about how there always seems to be a country somewhere whose people are in trouble and suffering and because we are so far from the issues, that perhaps we don't care as much as we should until its too late… it's not our problem…. "Darkest of souls we are…".

A question for you John, where did this vocal roar of yours come from?. I have the After Hours CD and I love it but on this album your voice fairly rips the face off the listener.

John: I didn't realise it did that! I don't know really, Andrew said to me, forget everything you've done in the past just feel the tracks and sing.

Alan:…John ate a lion!

The production on the album is stunning, Andrew Chick really is a find.

John: Yes he's a talented bugger isn't he. He makes me sick. (laughs)

Alan: Andrew has spent a lot of time as a producer and studio engineer in various studios and really knows his stuff. Yep, he's a genuine find.

If you play live will you add Shy and After Hours songs to your set or will you concentrate solely on the Edge Of The Blade material?

John: Nah, we'll just do Edge Of The Blade songs. We're already working on a second album so we'll do those too.

Alan: Personally I would love to play some Shy classics but I wouldn't want that to be the reason why people came to see us. 'The Ghosts Of Humans' album has some great songs on it that deserve to be heard and it has every reason to stand out on its own.

John: We could be putting together a live band to get the songs out there but don't tell anyone OK? It's a secret! Oh shit me and my big mouth! Sorry guys!

Alan: In the meantime folks, check out our album, it's Metal with melody…you're going to love it!

One can say that music is all about passion and that is what PowerPlay is all about, a passionate group of musicians that came together twenty some years ago in Denmark. They made an impression in that country, were readying their debut in the early nineties and... well, let us just say that other aspects of life got in the way, the group falling in to the shadows until 2010 as a matter of fact. Bruce E.J. Atkinson picks up the story, with PowerPlay's keyboardist Peter Gjedde…

When did you decide to get together again?

After many years of pursuing our individual careers outside the music industry, Erik and Simon felt it was about time to have a get together with the band and have a few beers. Thanks to Facebook they could easily reach out to each and every one of us and we all found that idea intriguing, and anyway who could say no to a free beer? It was a strange moment when we met again, everyone was recognisable and you could see who was who – but my God …. We all have lived the lives of wine and dining and the bodies appeared somewhat changed in size and shape. The magic was there in the very same second we were all in the same room again, and after half a beer we agreed to see if we still could get in the PowerPlay mood again, and so we started again in 2010.

Did you all just pick up where you left off?

It is funny that you ask this question as that is spot on. We really just picked up where we left off, jokes where the same, the tone was the same, although we have all been rounded with the years that have gone by and we are more relaxed and easy going. But when it comes to the PowerPlay music, the flame burns as it did back in time and we are now even more passionate with what we are doing and how we are doing it.

Was your passion and love for this melodic music the reason that you never really gave up?

We all had that flame inside of us that kept on burning for the AOR style of music, and we thought that our music was too good to just throw away and forget. At least we agreed to make the album, if not for others, then for ourselves as a manifest of us being here on earth creating great music and celebrating a friendship that was so strong that it survived more than two decades.

PowerPlay is considered a 'West Coast' band – musically speaking. Personally, I don't like to restrict any band with a certain style of music. Who are your influences?

We all listen to different types of music which we bring into PowerPlay, and that is the back bone of our music – we are influenced by acts like Toto, Giant, Journey, Supertramp, Starship and many more. The PowerPlay heart and soul burns for the good melody and a catchy refrain. An important part for us is the right mix between guitar and keyboards and the roles of those instruments; which instrument is driving what and so on. Also we do spend quite a large amount of time constructing how we want the backing vocals to sound – should it be rich or should it be more anonymous and yet catchy.

'All Those Years' is filled with very creative moments. Have you written entirely new music for the album?

The album consists of one third old material and the rest is all written in the period between 2010 and 2014. The song 'City Of Love' is one of the old songs and if you know Starship you may hear where we got the inspiration from for that song. The music is composed by Peter and Kurt, and Erik is writing all the lyrics and is naturally one of the main drivers when it comes to putting the lyrics and song together – but the music really first comes to life when the five of us are arranging it and putting things together, adding fragments from our different inspirational sources. We can rehearse for hours just to get a small piece of the music, like a bridge or a prelude, to sound absolutely right or just getting the moves sounding right – the devil is in the details.

Another band who rose from the ashes thanks to a Firefest reformation, Romeo's Daughter recently released their fourth album 'Spin' to a very positive reception. Vocalist Leigh Matty took time out to chat with adoring fan Alan Holloway.

It doesn't take long to find the dressing rooms and I am welcomed into the company of the band. I refer to a surprising comment I read in an interview that described the band as an 'overnight success' back in the late 90s. Unsurprisingly, they laugh.

"Bloody hell!" Leigh exclaims. "Overnight success? It took us years to make our first album! No, we've never been an overnight success, we weren't then and we certainly aren't now. It may have seemed like it… all of a sudden we seemed to come from nowhere."

I am intrigued, and ask how the band did come together.

"It's a very long and boring story" says Leigh. "Craig and Tony *(Mittman, former keyboard player)* were in a band together and Olga Lange, Mutt Lange's ex wife, decided to manage them. They were looking for a singer, and there was an ad in Melody Maker – 'Rock Singer Wanted!' I was very Punky at the time, with short hair… not very much a Rocker. I went to the audition and they saw another 75 women – then they came back to me and said 'You've got the job as long as you grow your hair'. Little did they know what hair it would become!" she finishes, fondling her Rapunzel like tresses.

I've noticed that several people have covered songs from that debut album, with Eddie Money doing a particularly awful version of 'Heaven In The Back Seat'.

"The most unusual is the Steps one," she says, referring to a shite UK pop band. "They did 'Stay With Me Tonight' – you wouldn't recognise it, it sounds so different. I think for us the biggest and the best was when Heart did 'Wild Child'." For the record, the Steps cover isn't bad, just bland.

Many people's earliest memories of Romeo's Daughter will include Leigh looking rather sexy in some of the band's videos and I wonder how it felt to be a late 90s sex symbol.

"I know I used to wear some skimpy clothing," she admits. "But it wasn't anything that we ever pushed… it's nice to know that people think I was. I only wanted to be known as a good singer." On cue, I assure her she is a great singer (I know the rules with the ladies).

The Firefest appearance prompted them to record a new album, 'Rapture', which was very well received.

"It was eighteen years from our last live gig to Firefest," Leigh confirms. "It went down very well. It was quite scary bringing out another album because a lot of people missed 'Delectable' (the second album) and so a lot of people were comparing it to the first, which had Mutt Lange and John Parr on it and was a huge expensive album – for us." I opine that the last two albums have sounded just as good, technically, and haven't suffered from the lack of Lange backing vocals etc, and have probably benefited from the lack of record company interference. "Obviously we have complete control," agrees Leigh, "but the other side of it is you have no support. We're learning as we go – we make our own videos, we do our own artwork… everything."

Looking back to when you were recording in the 1990s, have things changed?

We are totally old school, we want to play every single note live on to every track, no fancy preprogrammed or home recorded stuff. Naturally, we do have some overdubs here and there but it is our main principle to minimise that as much as possible, as we want to be able to have the exact same rich sound live as we have on the album.

Are you planning to take PowerPlay back on the road?

Yes we are indeed planning to perform some live gigs and actually we will play live at our release party on September 4th in Copenhagen.

What advice would you give aspiring musicians?

Today you can create any kind of music on your laptop, you do not need to buy expensive time in a top studio to get your music out there. But honestly, you can also hear that, as the sound is getting more synthetic and the groovy grooves are just not there anymore. Our advice to anyone who is passionate about what they are doing must be: don't ever give up, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, and be proud of what you are doing – don't ever stop believing!

I've been enjoying new album 'Spin' and tell them that it seems to me the lightest that they have yet done, which takes Leigh by surprise.

"That's really interesting you say that because we think it's the heaviest one we've done!" she laughs. "We're hoping to promote 'Spin' as much as possible. We're doing our own headlining tour later in the year. We're working on getting some other people involved to help us get some festivals because that's what we really want to do – we want to tour as much as possible. We'll keep on doing it for as long as people want to hear it."

I enquire as to whether 'Rapture' sold in sufficient numbers to fund the band.

"Oh absolutely. We always make enough money to fund the next record. We do everything in house, it doesn't cost anything to make the album or make the videos (they do it all on iPhones, tech fans) so basically we're very good at generating enough money to keep us going." I'm guessing, I say, that you're not in it for the money. "We're not in it for the money," Leigh agrees with a laugh.

Following the release in 2011 of their critically acclaimed second album 'Hisingen Blues' and its follow-up 'Lights Out' a year later, 2015 sees the release of the amazing new Graveyard opus 'Innocence & Decadence'. Ant Heeks got in touch with drummer Axel Sjöberg.

Graveyard have their own sound, spanning Classic Rock, Metal, Blues, Psychedelic and many more influences, yet your name hints at a more Doom-orientated style. What are the origins of the band?

Joakim and our former bass player Rikard started playing together as teens. In the early 2000s, when we had all moved to Gothenburg, me and Joakim were in a band, which Rikard soon joined. Quite soon thereafter Joakim, Rikard and me asked Truls to play with us. We had played together with his former band a bunch of times. Things started happening really fast and in 2007 we had signed our first deals. What influences our direction changes along with all the changes in our lives but I remember talking about wanting to write proper songs and not just fucking around. As with life in general, the direction you have is often a lot more easy to see in your rearview mirror. Although we play some sort of Rock, we've always listened to a lot of different music and bands that have incorporated different styles of music into their own songs.

How did you decide upon your name?

Band names.... Don't get me started. Our name came about after a long line of compromises and discussions. We wanted something simple and heavy at the time. Don't know if we would have chosen the same name today but after a while a band name loses its meaning and just becomes the name of the band. I neither like or dislike our name, it's just our band name. Sometimes I like it because it reminds that all we have is time, and then to try to make something good of the time I have been given to live. A friendly reminder that you're gonna die!

How would you describe the Graveyard sound?

We're a Rock band with a wide spectrum of songs. From light easy melancholic, to heavy straight on Blues Rock, to Soul, to Psych. Might sound schizophrenic or artsy-fartsy, but if you hear an album of ours I think you'll find it coherent and natural.

How do you feel about being compared to other bands?

Pretty fucking unavoidable. It's how the human mind works. How can you understand anything without other points of reference? BUT if you're a music writer and leave it at Led Zep or Sabbath, I'd say you're probably lazy as fuck, hungover or just a lousy writer. Of course this is from my own point of view… (laughs)

Can you explain the circumstances behind the line-up change in the band?

Well, I don't like to get too private, but in some ways we had a hard time getting our band to function properly and to focus on making music that we thought was awesome. After a lot of discussions and angst it led to Rikard choosing to quit. A while after, we asked Truls to help out with bass on some demos for the new album and soon after that we asked him to join again, but this time on bass. I've talked to Rikard about it since and he is really happy that it was Truls that came back and he's psyched to hear the new album. It only affected the recording positively, we could have full focus and with Truls back he also sings on one track. Excellent bass player too. He's had a lot of input on the new album.

Your new album has a very eye-catching cover, in complete contrast to your previous album 'Lights Out' with its "none more black" cover!

The artwork is made by Ulf Lundén, same guy who made the cover for 'Hisingen Blues'. He's VERY talented and has so many ideas. We usually just give him some lead words, try to explain a mood, and then he goes off for a while. He went around old churches to study wood carvings, bought equipment for it and everything but then he got this idea, and I absolutely love it. We try to get the covers to reflect the album as a whole. As for the title… 'Innocence & Decadence' is a pair that often come together, or one is followed by the other, or leads to the other if you're in certain environments. Maybe it's a bit of a hint on our journey as a band together.

As your music has so much depth in the arrangements and encompasses so many styles, how do you approach the song-writing process? Do you have to work hard to achieve that authentic retro sound?

First, we're a pretty democratic band so anyone can bring an idea for a song to the table and everyone is open for their ideas to be worked on, criticised, etc by the others. I think that might be one explanation for "depth and many styles". Self-hatred is a good one too. Don't let yourself off the hook too easy. Second, I strongly oppose the phrase "retro sound". If you would choose to build a brick house, would people go: "Oh, you're building a retro house." Probably not, more likely they'd say something like: "Oh, you chose that building technique to build your house." My point is that recording on tape doesn't make it retro. We just like it warm and organic and on the new album we've used a bit of computers too. More importantly, another studio and another producer. Which I think will be obvious when you hear it.

What are your touring plans to promote 'Innocence & Decadence'?

After the release it's just gonna be touring, touring, touring. Before Christmas we're gonna do some dates in Sweden, then a European tour that takes us over to England – unfortunately not the rest of the UK – and a shorter US tour on the west coast. More dates will obviously come and then there's the festival summer of 2016.

Photo: Wendy Vissers-Hagenbeek

Since 2012's 'Moments', IO Earth have undergone a transformation in terms of personnel and musical approach. That's not to say that you won't still recognise the beautiful textures and atmospheres this outfit thrive on, or that the Progressive soundscapes which have become the band's trademark have suddenly disappeared. However running alongside these integral elements are biting riffs and insistent rhythms, adding more urgency and potency to the mix; something founder member Dave Cureton puts down to the addition of new drummer Christian Jerromes and violinist Jez King, as he spoke to Fireworks' Steven Reid…

"They have made a huge impact on IO Earth," the guitarist, keyboard player and singer begins. "Christian is a powerhouse, 24 years old but with a huge musical brain. His drumming on this album is truly first class. Jez adds so much to Adam's [Gough, keyboards and guitar] orchestrations with his violin and brings a breath of fresh air to the IO Earth sound live and in the studio. He also plays guitar live to which is yet another string to his bow (laughs).'

Significantly, since we last spent 'Moments' with them, IO Earth have also changed vocalist, Linda Odinsen now fronting the band. Dave almost struggles to find the words to express the influence this hugely talented lady has had on IO Earth.

"'Well what can I say…. listen to the album, that is what she brings to this band. Linda has an amazing voice and her vocals on this album are perfect in every way. Her range is massive so she can do it all. Also she brings an ethereal aura to the band… see her live and you will know what I mean. Vocally, live, she is just on the money.'

Although surprisingly the addition of Linda finds IO Earth having their first full time lead singer.

"When Adam and I were recording the IO Earth debut album we had songs that required vocals, so we called on Steve Balsamo, Claire Malin and Louise Babbins as sessions vocalists. So they never were members of the band, while 'Moments' only featured Claire Malin and me on vocals, with Wendy Vissers-Hagenbeek on narrations," Dave clarifies. "Whilst Claire was pregnant in 2011, Linda stood in for her at some IO Earth shows. In 2013, she once more stood in for Claire at the 'Cruise to the Edge' festival held in the USA, featuring Yes. Claire decided not to attend our show just days before the festival, leaving the band quite literally in the shit! Linda had to learn our entire set in just one four hour rehearsal and to add more pressure to her we played all new songs that she hadn't performed with us before. However from Linda's first performance with the band, we knew that she would be perfect for IO Earth."

Over and above the line-up alterations, there seems to have been quite a distinct evolution in the IO Earth sound and approach from 'Moments' to the aptly titled 'New World'. It's a point Dave explains happened both intentionally and naturally…

"'We always try to make every album completely different to the previous albums but Adam and I just write music regardless of what style it is in. We don't write with a particular genre in mind, it just happens that way!" he laughs. "We believe that IO Earth cannot be pigeon holed into a particular genre and we like it that way, so the 'IO Earth Sound' will always evolve. With the addition of Linda, Jez, and Christian to the band, it really opened a whole new palette for Adam and I, so it was always going to take a different direction… but it is purely spontaneous. We start each album with a clean slate and then let it evolve to what it will become – it wasn't even intentional that 'New World' became a two disc album. We write what comes to us and 'New World' was born… However the reaction to the new album has been overwhelming and I am so pleased that people are really now getting what we are about."

Having been so forthcoming with his thoughts on the creation of the music on the wonderful 'New World', Dave suddenly becomes a little coy about the lyrical subject matter.

"Yes…" being his only answer when asked whether the recurring themes of discovery, overcoming adversity and moving on to better times found on the album have a more specific reason and emotions behind them. However when asked about the superb production which brings the songs to life, once again, there's no stopping him. "Our producer, Miguel Seco, has really excelled on this album. It sounds amazing! He has such a great ear and he really understands what Adam and I are trying to achieve with each album we make. The sound of the band is the most important thing… we are trying to produce a very classy high end product for music lovers all over the world and it has to be of the highest quality. We will never say 'That will do…' we always say 'It has to be PERFECT!' That is why it takes so long for an IO Earth album to be released."

And it is this eye for detail which shines brightly throughout not only every second of 'New World', but also its wonderful CD packaging and design.

"Our album art was designed by Wendy Vissers-Hagenbeek. It's stunning and really captures the vibe of the album," Dave says, rightly proud of how the beautiful visuals compliment the music they house. "Wendy is also our Co-Manager, Photographer, Web-Designer, Social Media Guru, New World Video Director…. etc etc etc etc etc …" he chuckles. "Wendy and I work 24/7 on IO Earth… she is the unsung hero of the band."

By the time you read this IO Earth will already have performed at the excellent Night of the Prog festival in Germany. However Dave is keen to point out that fans from near and far will have another couple of opportunities to sample the live IO Earth experience.

"Yes, we'll be at The Robin 2, Bilston on 1st November and the Cruise to the Edge in the USA on the 15th to the 19th of November… obviously for all the details go to www.ioearth.com."

And that too is where you should head if you want to unearth the 'New World' of IO Earth. It's an experience not to be missed.

DIMINO

Vocalist Frank Dimino first shot to fame in 1975 as the singer in Angel. Forty years later, Dimino is now gearing up to release his first ever solo album, the fantastic 'Old Habits Die Hard' via Frontiers Records. Ant Heeks caught up with Las Vegas resident Frank to find out more…

Congratulations on recording an excellent new album, you must be extremely proud of it?

Yes, I am. I'm very happy with the production and recording by Paul Crook and the Mastering by Maor Applebaum. The sound of the album really has a great quality to it. I'm also really happy with the performances on the album. The band, John Miceli, Danny Miranda and Justin Avery really made it come alive and the great guitar playing by Paul Crook, Oz Fox and Jeff LaBansky made it easy for our guest players to add their solos to the songs.

What have you been doing since the demise of Angel?

I have been doing a lot of singing live with Vinyl Tattoo, I've done some things with the Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp and a few guest spots on some recordings. I did a few Christmas songs with a band out here called The Sin City Sinners which was Todd Kerns from Slash's band and Brent Muscat from Faster Pussycat's band.

You have enlisted the support of some fantastic artists to assist with the recording of the album, who exactly is involved and how did you get them to perform on your album?

I guess we can start with Oz Fox. Oz and I have a band here in Vegas called Vinyl Tattoo, we have been working together for a while. Paul Crook I met when he was playing with Sebastian Bach and we did some dates together in Europe back when Barry [*Brandt, Angel drummer*] and I were touring with a revised Angel. Pat Thrall is part of an inner circle of friends comprised of Ken Ciancimino, Paul Crook and a few others, so Pat was involved from the beginning. Punky's involvement was easy. That was a phone call to my friend and asking him to play on my album. Eddie Ojeda was perfect timing. Paul and I are friends with Eddie and he happened to be coming to Vegas while we were recording, so we asked him to sit in on a song. Jeff Duncan subs for Oz in Vinyl Tattoo when Oz is doing Stryper dates and he's also in another band I have called More Cowbell. Rickey Medlocke is a very good friend of Ken's and when we needed a slide guitar he was our first option. Thankfully he had the time to do it and it worked out perfectly. The band was John Miceli, Danny Miranda and Justin Avery, this was a suggestion of Paul's because I wanted the same unit of guys to play the rhythm or bed tracks to all the songs.

I knew all the guys. I have played with a few of them and I've seen Meatloaf many times [*Paul, Danny, Justin and John are part of Meatloaf's touring band*], so I was very comfortable using them for all the songs.

Were you given any sort of brief from Frontiers Records about what kind of album they wanted from you?

No. Serafino and Frontiers have been very easy to work with. I had sent Serafino a demo version of 'Even Now', the song that Barry and I wrote. So I think he had a pretty good idea of what to expect.

Were all of the songs on 'Old Habits Die Hard' written specifically for the album, or did you have some songs already "in the vaults"?

All the songs are new, except for 'Even Now', that's the only track that was written before the record came about. All the other songs were new songs written for 'Old Habits Die Hard'. I wrote four with Oz and six with Jeff. Jeff LaBansky is a friend of mine that I have worked with in the past. When I called him and asked him to be part of this project, writing the songs came together very quickly.

One thing that strikes me is just how amazing your voice still sounds, how have you managed to keep it in such good condition?

I started taking vocal lessons when I was nine years old. I took lessons for years until I went to Berklee College of Music in Boston. After all those years of singing, I started to teach when I moved out here to Vegas. When I teach my students, it often reminds me of things that I've forgotten. So it keeps me on my toes.

Obviously you still perform often in Las Vegas, but are there any plans to take Dimino the band out on tour to promote the new album?

I would love to take it out on tour to support the 'Old Habits Die Hard' album. So I will be working on trying to put that together for the near future.

What is the current status of Angel at the moment?

We are all good friends. We don't talk to each other every day but we do keep in touch. I'm sure we will continue to work on each other's projects and if the timing ever becomes right, who knows. Anything is possible. We never say no.

Angel were known for their image, do you still have all your old stage costumes?

No, unfortunately all I have is my mic stand and my boots and that's why they are on the cover of 'Old Habits Die Hard'. I take my stand with me whenever I'm singing.

Angel were discovered by Gene Simmons - what do you think of Gene's comments that Rock music is dead?

I think Rock music will always be here. I think time brings change and the next Beatles or the next Bob Dylan will somehow find their way and will change things all over again and I think Frontiers is doing their part by keeping music alive with the artists that they have on their roster.

You have obviously been around the music industry for many years, what changes have you seen and what have you learnt from the business?

There have been so many changes with the music industry. I have seen the music business beat down a lot of people. There are a lot of really good musicians that are still out there and a lot of good musicians that have walked away. I keep doing what I do because I still have a strong passion to make music and to sing.

What about the current musical climate, what are your thoughts on today's acts and who do you enjoy listening to?

The music climate today is pretty spread out with all the different media available to everyone. I listen to a lot of music. I like Robert Plant's new stuff and I really like Chris Cornell. There's still a lot of good music out there. You just have to find it.

Finally, what would you say has been the highlight of your career so far?

I think back on all the things that we accomplished with Angel as a highlight and now a new chapter of having a solo album out becomes my newest highlight.

Mike Tramp

Over the years the former White Lion singer has proven he is a different person and makes solo albums to mirror his new identity as an artist. Following up from last year's 'Museum', Mike Tramp surprises and enchants again with his heartfelt tunes and warm vocals in his latest effort 'Nomad'. Mónica Castedo-López fired a few questions at him to gain a better understanding of the Danish singer/guitarist/songwriter and this profound album before he visits the UK in September as part of his next tour.

Your new album, 'Nomad', sounds amazing. The title sums up your current situation as a solo artist travelling around the world performing shows. How would you describe the album?

As much as I am not a fan of describing music in words, I know I have no way out. So most of all, I consider this album the end of the journey in search of who I am as a songwriter and artist. It's not that I have been searching with a microscope or in dark places of this earth, I just know that I have had questions along the road of my almost 40 years as an artist, and with the three past albums, I have taken the final three steps.

Has life on the road been the platform for your inspiration? I can imagine traveling on your own allows you a good amount of time to think and reflect about life.

Yes and no. The touring has been more about the accomplishment of doing this world touring all by myself and knowing that this simple form of campfire songwriting has stood the test of time and the audience have proven it night after night, year after year.

Which songs have more of a personal meaning to you?

On 'Nomad' in many ways I sing or write a bit more about my own personal outlook on this fuck-up planet that we live on. On the 'Cobblestone Street' and 'Museum' albums, I was deep in my heart and soul. I don't favour one over the other, but since 'Counting The Hours' was the first song I wrote for 'Nomad', I know it speaks loud to me in both music and lyrics.

Can you expand on the lyrics of the track 'Who Can You Believe'?

Basically, I have lost the last bit of faith that I had, and now find it impossible to trust anyone. Even the good guys who came in to town on their white horses, can't be trusted anymore, and governments treat soldiers (men and women) like disposable diapers. You give your life for your country and they leave you begging for food and sanity when you return home.

'Nomad' follows the same direction as your previous two solo albums, 'Cobblestone Street' and 'Museum', and it is the final episode to what you baptised as the trilogy of your journey to show who you are and where you stand. Can you expand on the correlation between the three albums?

Well, I could not have been so committed to 'Nomad' if I hadn't done 'Cobblestone Street' and 'Museum', and in many ways it's the same with how those albums support or build from one to another. Being able to go in and record any of the three albums and give it 100% without fear or compromise, is the only way I want to do it.

Please tell us about the musicians on the record.

The goal for me on this album was to capture the full band sound of five guys, playing ten songs like a band would, where the songs themselves are the variety and difference, but that band and the sound stays the same on all ten songs. I have worked with Soren Andersen on my past five albums, both as co-producer and engineer, and also as a guitar player. Drummer Morten Hellborn has been involved with me since the two Mike Tramp & Rock'n'Roll Circuz albums, and any time I use real drums, I will always use him. Same goes for keyboard player Morten Buchholz; we have done so many things together and he played on both 'Cobblestone Street' and 'Museum'. Bass player Jesper Haugaard is new to Tramp recordings but an old friend who's familiar with what I do and what I am. It's this kind of musical family that makes it possible to capture a band in the studio, sounding like we have always been playing. Believe it or not, we recorded all ten songs in one day and then Soren and I did my lead vocals and backing vocals over a couple of evenings.

In order to promote the album, you embark on a tour in August around Europe, and we very much look forward to seeing you in the UK in September. Will the band join you or will they be acoustic solo sets?

After three consecutive acoustic solo tours I feel I owe it to the dedicated fans to hear something different. This tour will be a full band but it won't be the band on the album and it also is not a reproduction of 'Nomad', but more a trip down Mike Tramp's huge back catalogue. One this tour I am taking a young band from Denmark called Lucer; a trio of energetic guys. They will also be my support band and I am excited that it's not so stiff but a bit of fun.

Your albums always have this beautiful mellow and melancholic feel. Do you intend to record any heavier music?

As I said before, the most important thing about the trilogy is about carving out in rock, who Mike Tramp is and that it or he won't change. I want to be thought of as something that doesn't change, something that when you think about the taste or the smell or the sound, it is clear in your mind what it is and not what it isn't, no confusion, and that is how people should review my albums and music. Not like a White Lion album, not like a Freak of Nature album, but like a Mike Tramp album.

Will there ever be a White Lion or a Freak of Nature tour again?

No, there will never be any White Lion reunion or anything. The friendship I have with my Freak of Nature brothers is strong and we could do something together. Still, I don't think I can or want to try to go out on stage and be the Mike Tramp I was in 1993. It might be impossible for me to do but we could still do something if it was in the cards. I think I said it when I said that I just want music fans to know who and what Mike Tramp is, regardless if it's what you fancy or not. Just don't say I am something I am not.

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'The Elegance Machine' is the eleventh album from one of Britain's best kept secrets, Newman. Steve Newman has plied his trade in Melodic Rock circles since the release of his debut album in 1997, each album growing and expanding a fan base eager to hear their trademark thundering riffs layered with succulent melodies. With a career now outstretching so many greats in the genre, Kieran Dargan caught up with Steve Newman to discuss 'The Elegance Machine' and just why Newman maybe fail to receive the recognition they rightfully deserve…

You have released eleven Newman albums so far, did you ever for a moment, think that you would get that far?

Absolutely not, I remember quite distinctly holding a copy of the first album in my hands and saying to myself "if this is the only album I make at least I have achieved this, and nothing, or no-one can take that away from me".

Not to mention having an almost 20 year recording career?

Yeah, that's crazy. Ultimately I do this for myself, but the belief and comments I get from fans has brought me this far without a doubt.

Most bands these days are becoming more and more unproductive with regard to new studio recordings, yet you seem to be becoming more productive. How come you are bucking the trend?

I just love to create new music. I'm not a believer in churning out the same songs, and especially going out and playing the same songs live. I guess a lot of bands get into to that rut, but when you look at it, a lot of those bands only have a few remaining members and those are maybe not the ones that wrote the initial hits. However, good for them if promoters and fans want to pay for that.

I have renewed respect for Joe Elliot and Def Leppard when they were interviewed recently, Joe was quite adamant that he wanted to continue to release new material and be creative because that is why he loves music so much, and let's face it, if any band could sit back and just play their hits night after night it's those guys.

Can you tell us about the title of the album, 'The Elegance Machine'?

I guess it's a little bit of a play on words, especially when you view the cover. The title song is based on the catwalk and supermodels, and the almost conveyer belt type moulding and promoting of image and the "in" thing. I was quite taken with the concept of something which is beautiful and elegant but having the coldness of a machine.

You deal with some pretty heavy subjects - 'Suits' is about corporate greed and 'She Walks In Silence' deals with domestic abuse. Not exactly subject matter that has been greatly explored in the Melodic Rock genre.

Yes, you're right, I've never been one to sing about "cruising down the boulevard looking for chicks"… besides, we don't have many boulevards in West Sussex. I've always tried to sing about subjects that are real, or historical, and I guess that's almost expected from a Newman album these days. I try to keep myself knowledgeable in lots of different areas, and also aware of what is going on around me and the world we live in. I'd like to think that my songs and lyrics are based on observations, I certainly don't want to preach to anyone, there's enough of that in the world already. I think that personally this induces more colour in the lyrics, after all, as with many bands, so much thought and attention is given to complex musical arrangements. I want to make people think, and take them on a journey lyrically as well as musically. It's all part of the creative process for me.

It's noticeable that over the last few studio albums, certainly from 'The Art Of Balance' onward, that you have toughened up the sound a little. Conscious decision, or just purely co-incidence?

You know, I'm not sure really, I think I have always had a slightly harder edge to my writing, but I think you're right, it's come out more in the last few albums. I listen to a lot of different music these days, from Jazz right through to Progressive Metal, so maybe it's coming out in my influences just like the first album did with a more Journey/Toto vibe. I still listen to the classic albums of our genre but I believe there's some great music out there now, and I think for me I tend to gravitate towards songs/artists with a slightly harder edge especially in the Melodic Rock genre.

How has the writing and recording process changed for you over the years. Obviously you have your own studio which *should* make life easier, but more so in how you approach the entire project?

It's changed dramatically since the first album – which incidentally was recorded and mixed in around 10 days! My time with Escape Music and the recording of those albums was also different because I was often travelling to multiple studios and working with a lot of mixers and producers. I'm not saying that was a bad thing, indeed, I try even now to limit myself on the time it takes to record. I have the ability to make everything sound so perfect and work on it for months at a time but I strongly believe that perfect isn't always good. I think sometimes there's too much technology at the fingertips and everything can begin to sound stale and lifeless.

I approached 'The Elegance Machine' in the same way I have approached the last few albums. I tend to write from an acoustic and record ideas musically and vocally into a Dictaphone. As in the case of the new album I ended up with around 30 ideas and sat with those ideas for months, just listening to the melodies over and over and gradually whittling them down to around 15 songs. I know then that if I've been able to put up with those melodies for 12 months then the song has staying power, so I'm good to subject the world to it! (laughs) I think it's a good test, I want my albums to have longevity, so that people can return to them after a few years and get the same listening experience.

A friend recently told me that Newman are one of England's best kept secrets. Are you happy with where Newman stands in the grand scheme of things?

I don't think there are any new UK bands that are particularly well known in the Melodic Rock genre at the moment. We have our FM's etc., who rightly deserve to be where they are, and, they're creating new music which is a great thing. I know that myself and the band's popularity has increased

hugely over the last few years due to social media such as Facebook and YouTube, and of course the live shows we have played.

You have one live show coming up on home town turf in August. How difficult is it for Melodic Rock bands to get out and play?

Unfortunately, the simple answer to anyone that says "Why can't you play in my town?" is unless your town is in one of the main catchment areas in any country it's unlikely we'll be passing near. There simply isn't enough interest in this form of music to embark on a 20-plus date tour of the UK, let alone any other country. So we need to look very carefully at where we can play geographically to draw in the most people, and that's also the reason why festivals are a big attraction for us. I am very fortunate that I have a band around me that loves to play so we try and compromise and make dates work, it would be simple to stand back and say "I'm not doing that unless you pay me X amount of pounds for appearance, hotels, food…" but those demands are not a reality if you do genuinely want to go out and play.

That all said, I made a decision a couple of months ago to hold off on any live dates we do until next year. We have a lot of shows in negotiation currently, not only in the UK, but Europe and the US, so it's just a case of tying everything up before we can go forward and announce where we will be playing in 2016.

What can we expect from Newman in the future?

Personally, for me, I haven't lost my creative spark, I still get massively excited over new ideas in the same way as I did when I first started songwriting, so I will continue to write and produce albums until I feel I have nothing more to say or give. In regards to the production side of things, after the promotion for 'The Elegance Machine' has finished I will be starting on the mixing stage for the new Paris album and also recording and producing a new female pop artist called Kiera Boyle, as well as a few more projects lined up for next year.

One thing is for sure, if anyone had told me, back in 1997, that I would still be producing albums now, I would have seriously questioned their sanity. So I'm very fortunate to have so many great people around me, and fans that truly appreciate what I do, I couldn't ask for anything more.

backyard babies

Interview with Dregen and Nicke Borg
by Mónica Castedo-López

After a five year hiatus, the Swedish party rockers make a celebrated comeback with a brand new album, the adrenaline-infused 'Four By Four'. To discuss the release, the chatty and cheerful pair of guitarist Dregen and singer/guitarist Nicke Borg flew to London and granted the following interview to yours truly.

Why a five year hiatus?

N: Since we actually started to talk about that last spring (writing and recording the album), it's five years today. We told everyone we were going to take a break and don't call us, we'll call you because we wanted to have all the doors open when and if we were going to do something again. We got to do solo stuff, radio and other stuff. Then we felt that Backyard Babies were knocking on the door again and it felt good because that's the reason why you take a break from something you love: if it's meant to be there, it's going to come back to you. Luckily the fans were still there.

D: The last show we did together was in Japan in spring 2010. We started to write in September last year so it's actually four years. So if we hadn't had said anything to the press we could have been working on a new album all this time. In Sweden we were angry with the press.

N: They kept saying that we had split up but we never said that. But that has actually helped with coming back with a new album as people were not expecting it.

Why did you decide to take a break in the first place?

D: We were fried, done, like a Rock 'n' Roll overdose, I'd say.

N: For me, I wasn't sure what I was doing anymore because we started this band for so many different reasons, and music was not the biggest reason. The whole Rock 'n' Roll thing was very attractive. When we grew up in a small city we were influenced by Kiss and then Guns 'N' Roses came along. We wanted to play in Hollywood, Japan, tour around the world and have hundreds of girls, and to play all the big stages and we set out to do that, and we did. But once we did it for a while, especially when I got sober, I was like: "Is this really what we are going to do? Are we going to write good songs? Can we do it?" In any relationship you have, you must stop for a little while and re-evaluate and look at it from the outside, and that is what we did. And thank god all four of us came to the same conclusion that we should do it.

The four of you have played together from the beginning. Do you think that taking a break is part of the secret to keeping the same line-up?

D: We've been such a hard working band. We formed in 1989, we got our first record deal in 1994, without any money, and then from 1994 to 1998 we started to tour even more. From 1998 to 2010 we have been constantly making records and touring. The last tour we did, it was fun but I couldn't really tell if the gig was good or bad. We became four machines in a way.

N: I think also we had seen our idols or favourite bands starting to make worse and worse records and when a great band starts to be a parody of what they used to be, that is the worst thing. So by being a little bit afraid of that, we also felt like we couldn't continue then and make not that good records anymore. The last album we made, 'Backyard Babies', in 1998 was a great album but that was it. I don't think I had any fucking chords left in me and also there was nothing left to say and sing about at that time.

Would you say that with 'Four By Four' you come back revitalised, ready to take on the world again?

D: Yes, and you can hear there's a band playing in the studio having fun, and we were quick and really organised.

Did you write the songs before you got to the studio?

N: Oh yes, but the writing process was also really fast and we know straightaway what is a good idea for a song.

D: To be creative is a state of mind. We've done a lot of great albums but it's been a lot of mental work because we had been tired, hungover, stressed. This time everyone had positive thinking and it was fun to write again.

N: We're sounding a bit grown-up today, which we are. We were in a mansion outside Milton Keynes in 2011 trying to start recording and we played golf for six weeks!

So, this time it was different?

N: Yes, we wouldn't have been able to do this record now if we hadn't done these type of things. You need to be 50% crazy, otherwise you can't stand this business.

D: We are mentally kind of retarded: we're young at heart because we have deadlines as well. This time we had a producer, we knew what we were doing but we also have kids nowadays, so I have to work around my kid, so I need to concentrate on music say from 10am to 4pm. Kids are good for this reason.

Did you all write together for the album?

N: I had a lot of song ideas but whether every song is more or less finished, we still work together in the studio. You may not think that, but it's totally necessary that Dregen arranges the drums.

Did you compile ideas you had during the break?

D: I need to do something with all my energy since I quit drugs, so I basically write all the time.

N: The good thing about being songwriters is that you come to a certain point on your own and it's fun, then you pass on the bucket.

D: I'm the opposite: I think of music as a painting. First you have a blank canvass and Nicke does some outlines and I can throw in the colours. Today you can do everything on your own on your laptop but you shouldn't because when we write and rehearse there are mistakes. We are not the greatest musicians but that's what makes the Backyard Babies sound. We're great songwriters and we have great energy and are really tight as a band. If you single out the channels you can hear that the bass and the guitar are playing different notes, but when we play together it's our sound.

Which of your previous albums would you compare 'Four By Four' to?

N: The key is that there's something in each and every of our albums that is very Backyard Babies. So without trying or thinking too much the new album is a kind of mix of all our albums and of course a lot of new grooves, stuff we have never done before.

D: Also, we now have a slow Rock song, kind of a ballad, 'Bloody Tears', and we hadn't done that stuff since the first Backyard Babies album, 'Diesel & Power', in 1994.

I want to ask you about the lyrics of 'Never Finish Anything', where it says 'no solution, no problem'.

N: Most of the lyrics were written really fast. It's a very accurate song to how the world is today: totally fucked-up.

D: If you analyse it, they are the least Rock 'n' Roll lyrics on the album, but the cool thing is that maybe there is no solution, but there's no problem because we maybe should focus on ourselves and change ourselves so that the world would continue to be around.

D: Everybody's got to have a solution for everything all the time. You know why? Never fucking mind: go with the flow.

N: The world doesn't need to be saved, it's the human beings that need to be saved.

You played Download and you're coming back to the UK in November. Which songs from the new album will you include in the set list?

D: I think four new songs should be included in the set: 'Thirteen Or Nothing', 'Bloody Tears' and maybe 'Never Finish Anything', but it's going to end with 'Walls' before the encore.

What do you want to do in the future?

N: I want to have another gold record and another Grammy, because this record really deserves that, and for people to buy the album, enjoy the music and come to our shows.

A year ago they returned refueled – literally and figuratively. Now they're back again and, as they say, scarred for life! Here's Alexandra Mrozowska discussing all things Skintrade – especially their new CD 'Scarred For Life' – with the band's lead singer Matti Alfonzetti.

Only a year since you released 'Refueled', now you're back with 'Scarred For Life'. What do you think it is that helps to maintain the quality of your music?

I guess writing songs has never been an issue with me or this band. I write songs all the time and when I say all the time, I literally mean all the time! It is a never ending process in my head, so there's no shortage of songs… Then they must pass the scrutiny of the rest of the band before they get worked on for album material of course.

How has the feedback you've received from reviewers been so far?

Reviews so far have been overwhelmingly positive. We do listen to criticism, of course, but in the end it's always the vision of the band and what we want to do musically that comes first. If we were to get bad reviews, then I would probably… might... then, no, I would still follow my own vision I'm afraid.

One could have thought it's a live album because of the cover shot. Were you trying to capture a live vibe for the band?

Yes, that's exactly what it was! I was looking at album covers from my collection and found The Clash's 'London Calling'. I thought; what an awesome picture! We tried to create the same vibe and to just show that we are, first and foremost, a live band. Also, it was time for a change from our previous album covers.

The album's title comes from the opening track, 'Scarred For Life'. What message does this convey?

It's actually a reference to music and how it sort of leaves a scar on all those who decide to do it professionally, with all the hardships that comes with it. Once you know that this is all you want to do in your life, then you are scarred for life, so to speak.

The sound on 'Scarred For Life' is pretty modern. Are you inspired by contemporary Rock bands more than by those you grew up with?

Tough one. Yes, we are inspired by contemporary Rock bands just as much as the bands we grew up with: I'm talking Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, AC/DC and so on but I think the sound comes from our vision to be contemporary, whilst our heart is always in the '70s and '80s. For me influences change every week. I can hear something new like Royal Blood and get so inspired that I write new songs instantly. Next it will be an old Thin Lizzy song that will get me going…

What do you think are the strongest points of the new album song-wise?

Since I´m the writer of all these songs, the answer is pretty obvious... all of them! To pick personal favourites, I would have to say 'Scarred For Life', 'Find A Way' and 'Leave A Scar', but that's for this week! I will probably feel differently next week!

What's prompted the cover of Katy Perry's 2012 single 'Wide Awake'?

Mainly because it's a killer song and because I was looking for something different and unexpected for us. I played around with this song on a piano and realised that it would be perfect for Skintrade. It has a tonality and harmonic structure that's perfect for us as we like the dramatic big riffs and melodies.

For the album, you worked with Oscar Ammer again. Weren't you a bit afraid it may result in an album that sounds too similar to 'Refueled'?

No. We had a discussion about this very early on and made some decisions regarding production. Oscar was fine with everyone and really up for it, so everything was cool from day one.

If you look back at your early albums, what do you think about the evolution the band has gone through since 1993's 'Skintrade'?

I would say, basically that we haven't changed that much, apart from having a more contemporary sound. Skintrade always was, and always will be, about the songs. Melody and guitar riffs play their part equally. If the song isn't there, we dump it and move on to the next one.

Back to the present - last year you played a couple of gigs throughout Europe. What about your plans for this year?

We have some festival dates in Sweden this summer booked and we are planning a tour in the fall that will hopefully take us to the UK and Europe this time, so really looking forward to that.

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THE DEAD DAISIES

Interview by Sue Ashcroft

I recently made a trip to London to meet up with two of my favorite people in the whole world – former Motley Crue, The Scream, Union vocalist John Corabi and bass player extraordinaire Marco Mendoza. We met to talk about the new Dead Daisies album, which both are an integral part of, but first of all, I wanted to know how they both got involved in this mainly Australian band?

MM: The founders Dave Lowy and Jon Stevens had a situation going that had to do with writing some songs, they demoed some stuff, started diggin' each other and the vibe. I was in Australia with Thin Lizzy on the Mötley Crüe/KISS tour and Lowy was there with Diva Demolition, that's how I met Dave. They had a cool vibe, cool songs and then I met David Edwards, his manager who is now our manager, back stage and we got along. David approached me and said "You know Lowy has got a project that he's thinking about doing and he wants to invite you to participate?" I went home, two weeks went by, he got in touch and he says "Yeah, we're moving forward." I said "Great man, send me the music so I know what I'm getting myself in to" and I dug the vibe, I dug the direction, we had a chance to really talk in depth about what their intentions were.

In addition to that, they were talking to Richard Fortus and Dizzy (Reed) and everybody else and Richard and I had a history from Thin Lizzy and we always talked about doing something. Before you know it, we did the tour and at the end, everybody is like "Wow, this is too good, we can't leave it". So there were talks about taking it to the next level and there was a few problems with the drummer and with Mr. Stevens, he had some personal issues that he couldn't cross and we had plans, we had booked a few things. So everything was in the works, Jon couldn't cross his situation, so we started talking and John Corabi was one of the first picks. I've always loved John, his vibe as a human being. He's a great front-man, singer and all that. Beyond that, when you take it on the road and start spending time with people, you wanna have fun, you wanna hang out with people who are doing it for the right reason, which is the music. I'm not blowing smoke up his ass, but that's why he's doing this and I believe I'm doing it for the same reason. So he came to Cuba and hit it out of the ballpark and we all just got along so well and here we are. It's one of those things and there's a reason why things happen, I'm a firm believer in that.

JC: Marco called me in January, February I went out to see everybody in LA. We had dinner, end of February we were in Cuba. Mid March we were in Australia. We started the record in March, we were done April 12th.

MM: Its just been a lot of fun really, creatively speaking.

JC: Everybody has done this for so long, the talent is there, so you can literally come in and go "I've got this riff" and somebody is gonna get it. Even if it's one note, they're gonna be like "Oh!" You know, it was very easy, like Marco had ideas, Dizzy had ideas, David Lowy had ideas, Richard had some, I had some and we just threw 'em in there and everybody was like "Oh yeah!" Or even if it was just a couple of guys, the song, it just came.

MM: It just clicked.

JC: And I mean, you have the record, there's 13 songs on that, we still have 4 songs left over. But we did like 16 or 17 songs, wrote, recorded, mixed and mastered and did the artwork in just 30 days.

MM: It's a massive amount of work.

JC: It just doesn't normally happen like that, but you know even with having Marco and Dizzy, I would sing something and Dizzy would say "Well what if you phrased it like this?" I would sing a sentence and I would go "Man, I'm not crazy about the melody, I don't know if my melody is carrying the song." And Marco's like "Wait, wait, wait!" and he'd come in and put a harmony on it and it takes off. So there was so many different ideas and talent, but at the end of the day, for the fact that we had time constraints, I don't think I've laughed harder than we did. It was hilarious every day. I mean we were stressed about getting the record done in time, but we had fun man, it was just awesome.

Do you feel that perhaps, at your age, you've gone past the point where you have anything to prove?

JC: Right now, all you can control, is the things you can control. You do a record, you do the best you can, you sing the best you can, you play the best you can, put it on… commit it to, whatever – can't say tape anymore – and then keep your fingers crossed and maybe there's a song on there that the public embraces and the thing just goes through the roof. If it doesn't, it doesn't, you know, but we've all kind of gotten to the point where we're all being very creative. We're all having fun, we actually enjoy hanging out with each other, which is a huge thing for me, I don't want to be in a band where I don't enjoy it.

MM: No you know, to back him up. It's very conducive, when you're having fun, to be creative, I believe in that. I've been in projects where it's too brainy and it's too intense and the doors start shutting down. I believe in a spiritual thing, when you're laughing and you're having fun, the doors are open for any possibility and our job is to grab it, it's just there boom, boom, boom and then management, a lot of gratitude to management, because they recruited the best marketing team they could possibly

get, all these pistons are going, unlike any other projects that I've been involved with. Right now there's just so much momentum and rhythm and all we have to do is do the creative side, put on the best shows we can and have a good time doing it.

JC: But I still liken this thing to – I just recently read the Rod Stewart autobiography and he talks about how he was doing his solo thing, but still in The Faces and he goes "The coolest thing about The Faces was that they didn't look at it as a band…" so he said, every gig they would meet at a pub across the street and they would go have a couple cocktails and just sit and tell some new joke that they heard, or talk about soccer or talk about whatever and then they would walk across the street and they would do these shows that were just kind of spontaneous and chaotic and just fun and whatever. So he goes "it was never really a band, it was just a bunch of mates, hanging out and jamming together". And that's kind of how I look at this thing, I know somebody even said to me like "How are you gonna do both? Like your thing and this?" Rod Stewart did it for years with The Faces and his solo career, I'm looking at this, hopefully, the same way. So it's pretty cool, I'm very proud of this record, I think this could be one of the best records I've ever done in my life and in the amount of time that we did it, I'm hugely proud of the fact that we did it in 30 days. It was pretty intense.

You've got a cover version on there and, being Scottish, I've been obsessed with the Sensation Alex Harvey Band since I was 10. Why cover the Sensational Alex Harvey Band and why choose 'Midnight Moses'?

JC: Years ago, when I lived in Philadelphia there was a band called The Dead End Kids, they were genius. They were a train wreck of drugs – had they been able to keep their shit straight, they would have truly been one of the biggest bands in the world. They were unbelievable; they were Mötley Crüe way before Mötley Crüe… and Guns N' Roses as well, I might add. That whole "Are they gonna make it through the set?" I used to go see them when I was 18 years old and they would come on stage and they would start with 'Midnight Moses' and for years I thought it was an original. They would do these kicks and spin the guitars like Cinderella, they were the first ones that did it and I'm like "Oh my God, those guys are amazing." Years later, somebody turned me on to this boxed set… 'Framed', 'Alex Harvey' and another record and I put this record on and I'm listening to all this stuff and I'm like "Oh! It was a cover song they were doing!" There's something about that fucking riff, for me personally, that just drives me ape shit. I met the Dead Daisies, at dinner we were talking about covers. I go, "I've always wanted to this song by the Sensational Alex Harvey Band, it's called 'Midnight Moses'". I found the video and then the next thing I know, we were doing it live in Cuba and immediately we did it and the audience came right back and everybody is like, "Okay, this could be really cool." So we actually recorded it while we were in Cuba.

Right, so, you're out on tour at the moment with KISS. How's that going?

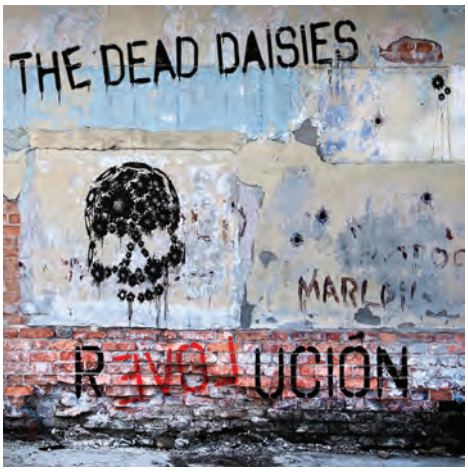
MM: We're all friends and I've had the luck to have been there before and they're really cool, they really take care of us. They make sure we get what we need.

JC: They're being stupidly supportive. They're giving us quite a bit of lighting, full PA, our rooms are always right next to theirs and Gene came in the other day and did the hilarious dance.

MM: Yeah, the James Brown thing.

JC: Yeah, he comes in and he's like "Hey! I got the Beverly Hills Blues." And he's dancing around the room and he goes "I got the Beverly Hills Blues." He goes "Because my limo was late." And then he walked out the room.

MM: We're having a blast. You couldn't be in a better place to be honest, to play in front of a KISS audience. I think we're



getting some traction and people are going "Wow, that's cool, it's a cool project".

Paul, he's got a good heart… he remembers. Every time I have a chance to talk with him, he remembers the hard work. Like the other night, I came off and I just mentioned "Jeez, it would be nice if they knew the songs, like the old days, the radio would play it and give you a heads up." But still we're getting people singing the lyrics to some of the songs so we are getting some traction there. He says "Marco, that's what we did man, we used to go out there and put the makeup on and the whole thing and people would look at us like we were crazy, but we believed in what we were doing." He said "I never wanna forget that, so don't you forget it. You go out there and do the best" and I go "You're right, dude".

JC: Even on a personal level, Richard was saying he was going through some personal things the last time he toured with them and he had talked to Paul about it in passing and he said it was crazy, they got off tour with him and then Paul sent him a text message like a week or two later asking "Hey, how did everything turn out? Everything good?" That was pretty fucking cool, that's like amazing that he's concerned about him.

MM: At the end of the day, they're still human beings and they know what it is to try and break a new project and the work and the sweat and the blood and the tears and the screaming and the yelling and the pressure that we're under, but we're doing it and so we do get the applause from them and the support. It means a lot and for me, I don't know about anybody else, but every time I go out there, when I have time, this tour's been rough 'cause we've been working, but I'll go to the sound board every so often and watch. It's a spectacle. It's frickin theatrical, frickin bombastic, in your face; it's insane what goes on and they've been doing that for years. So they deserve all the success in the world.

JC: One of the first times I saw KISS, I was 16 I think, it was the first live record? And the fact that I'm in my 50's and sharing a stage with them… this writer asked me "How does it feel as a musician, to see a band that aren't very good musicians that rely more on the show" and I said "How can you say that? Honestly, I'm not trying to start an argument with you, but I totally disagree. I've had to learn a lot of those KISS songs and some of Gene's bass lines are pretty fucking cool". It's not like Yes or Rush, but they're cool, they fit the songs and how many records have they done? 25, 26? And they're still churning out songs, how can you say they're not good musicians?

MM: They've set the standard for what a Rock band is, what a Rock show should be.

Right, one more thing, you played Download and they only gave you 25 minutes at 11 o'clock in the morning?

JC: That's right. You know what, honestly, we were grateful they're gave us 25 minutes. We could destroy you in 10, but the fact that they're gave us 15 extra minutes is awesome.

MM: Management was talking to us, "Guys, there's a slot at 7am." and we'd have got 15 minutes, so it was an upgrade! Just to be there was good exposure.

Shortly after the interview, the following Dead Daises dates were confirmed:

4th Dec: Planet Rockstock, Wales
5th Dec: Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton
6th Dec: Rescue Rooms, Nottingham
8th Dec: Cathouse, Glasgow
9th Dec: Academy 2, Newcastle
10th Dec: Academy 3, Manchester
11th Dec: The Garage, London

The album 'Revolucion' is now available from all good stockists and there is also a documentary and book about the band's historic trip to Cuba. Check www.thedeaddaisies.com for all the latest news and info. For the full version of this interview, please visit www.rocktopia.co.uk

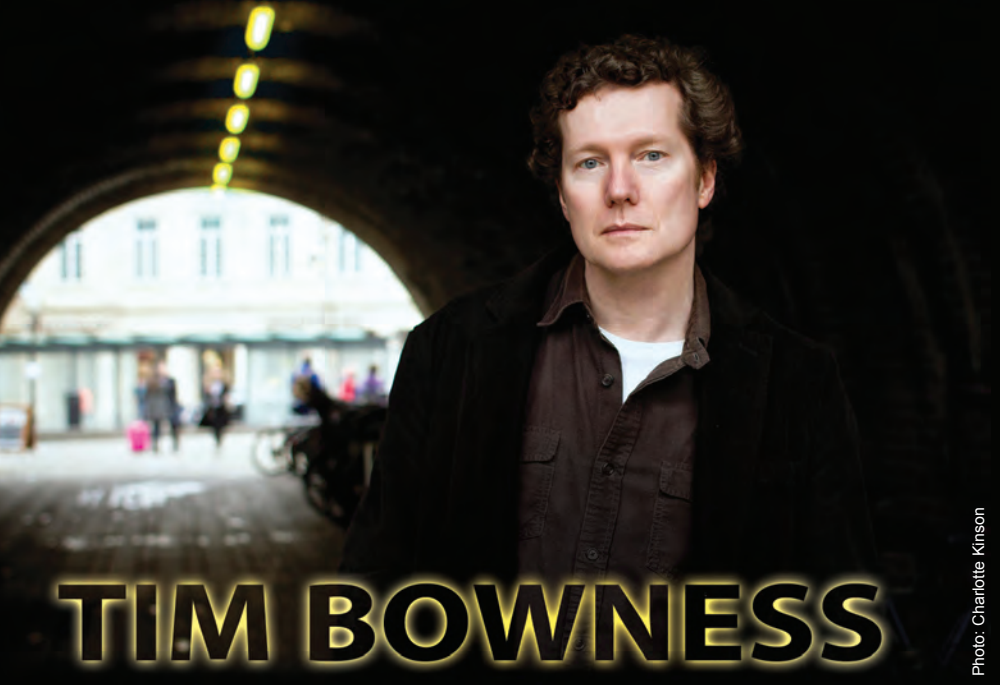


Photo: Charlotte Kinson

TIM BOWNESS

We all have them, those 'Stupid Things That Mean The World', yet solo artist and No-Man frontman Tim Bowness has chosen to share his through his second solo album in just over a year. It's a stunning release, fragile yet strident, confident yet intimate and never less than utterly captivating. Fireworks' Steven Reid provided the stupid, Tim brought the world…

"…The starting point for 'Stupid Things That Mean The World' was the album's title track. I wrote it in my home studio just a few weeks after 'Abandoned Dancehall Dreams' had been released. 'ADD' had generated some of the best responses I'd ever received for an album and I was feeling positive and enthusiastic about developing more solo work.

"The album was mostly the result of a concentrated burst of musical activity. A couple of the pieces came from my unreleased archive, including an old No-Man demo. The old pieces were significantly altered in terms of arrangement and performance and in the case of the No-Man demo new lyrics and new instrumental sections were written.

"Because 'Abandoned… eventually became my idea of what a No-Man album should sound like, I'd like to think it had an identity of its own. With this material, to an extent I was using 'ADD' as my springboard and seeing how I could develop what had emerged as a solo character even further. I've always been drawn to the epic as much as the intimate and 'ADD' showed that. With 'Stupid Things…', I wanted to take that aspect further. Of course, there are intimate pieces on the album, but I do feel that like No-Man, this album displays a greater sonic range and reflects more aspects of my tastes than most of my work with other projects, although that isn't to criticise my other work."

Steven Wilson mixed 'ADD' but this time The Pineapple Thief team of Bruce Soord (mixing) and Steve Kitch (mastering) took the helm…

"Steven recommended Bruce, I really liked the fact that he could do hard and soft, and electronic and acoustic equally well. Bruce recommended Steve. In both cases, they were really easy to work with and good choices. Steven didn't add anything instrumentally to 'ADD' - bar an existing guitar line on one of the songs. He suggested a very different approach to one of the mixes, but otherwise he just offered his typically brilliant, sonically immaculate mixing skills. Bruce was slightly more hands-on in that he played on more tracks than Steven did. Generally, he enhanced pieces by playing some guitar parts better – mine, not Michael Bearpark's! On a couple of occasions, he suggested additional textural ideas and alternative guitar lines. That was apparent on 'The Great Electric Teenage Dream'. He really beefed up what was there. Like Steven, he just did a really nice job in translating my ideas. Mixing is an underrated skill. Having ideas is essential, but so is sonically making them sit properly. Steve Kitch did a quick and very professional job with the mastering."

With not only Bruce's stunning playing on the album, but also Porcupine Tree bassist Colin Edwin's, it must be a most fortunate position for any artist to be in to have such talent available to bring their vision to fruition.

"Absolutely. Colin is great and very imaginative in terms of treatments. He loves playing with different sounds and approaches, so he was really pleased that I asked him to use acoustic double bass and fretless as well as more conventional bass styles on the album. He's a great asset live as well. I first did something with Colin in the early days of No-Man but it's only recently that we've done a lot of work together."

Tim' last album had a theme running through it using the 'Dancehall…' as a basis from which the songs told their stories and commented on life. With his new album having the wonderful title 'Stupid Things That Mean The World', can we presume there's a similar approach?

"The new album's title concerns the small and seemingly trivial things that make us who we are or help us through our lives. It could be an old toy, art or music, shared intimate language, a belief system, an annual holiday, the image or idea of someone you loved in your youth and so on. I was also thinking of something like the significance of the seemingly insignificant Rosebud in Citizen Kane. I'd say that some, possibly most, of the songs reflect the title's suggested theme.

"'Know That You Were Loved' is made up of stupid things that mean the world, and most of the other tracks suggest trivial things or moments that have importance to the individual. 'Press Reset' and 'At The End Of The Holiday' are two of my favourite lyrics on the album and have more of a short story quality about them. The first is a depiction of someone desperate to escape the pressures of their life, while the second is about a temporary escape from domestic difficulties.

"'The Great Electric Teenage Dream' is part of a larger project called 'Third Monster On The Left'. A few tracks from it appeared on 'ADD' and I'm hoping to present it as a complete project at some point in the future. If it comes off, it'll be a Rock Opera about Rock!"

Musically the album has a wide and varied approach, yet it's still remarkably cohesive. Does that result from a pre-planned vision or a completely organic process?

"Both. With the two latest solo albums I had a very strong idea of how I wanted them to sound and what musical areas I'd like to explore. That said, the music evolved in a very organic way and with both albums quite a few pieces had to be dropped in order to achieve the effect I was originally after. Sometimes, without realising, you can go off course musically or thematically. The final edit is where everything comes together. Album structure is something very important to me, as is album artwork, and I often take an abnormally long time sequencing albums.

"I was pleased that 'Stupid Things…' did work as a coherent entity, because as you say, it consists of quite varied elements. In retrospect, I wondered if I was subconsciously influenced by 'Revolver'. 'Revolver' is a coherent album statement yet it features incredibly diverse songs that go from Pop to Rock, Indian Raga to children's songs, strange experiments to heartbreaking Classically influenced ballads. My music's nothing like The Beatles - though I am a fan and have been since I was a kid - but 'Revolver' has been the album I've heard - by far! - the most over the last year due to my four year old son being obsessed with it. As such, elements of its diversity might have seeped into my thinking."

And with talk of the live band are they're plans to take this album out on the road?

"I'll be playing in Bristol, London and Poland in late August and I'm hoping to play elsewhere soon after - both in the UK and abroad. We tend to work to the strengths of the band, so songs are always interpretations rather than direct replicas of the recordings. It makes it more of an evolving, living process. It's Jazz (not Jazz)!"

HUNGRYHEART

Continuing the resurgence of Italian AOR and Melodic Rock, Hungryheart have just released their third album, 'Dirty Italian Job'. Bruce Mee catches up with guitarist Mario Percudani and vocalist Josh Zighetti…

The debut album was released in 2008, the follow up in 2010. Why five years until 'Dirty Italian Job'?

Josh: Following the good feedback given for our One Ticket to Paradise Tour we had five tough years where we were busy living our lives, private business and side-projects, but not losing the feeling of making our music. Immediately after 'Dirty Italian Job' came out on June 29th we received amazing feedback all over the world. I personally think that this album is more than a bunch of Hard Rock songs, and if I just close my eyes and lay down with my heart open, immersing myself in the new material, still I can see what our dreams are made of. That's nice and makes me proud of what we have done. Now, I've got a felling we're heading in the right direction...and that's the only direction I care about right now.

Mario, you've worked and played with a lot of well-known names in the Melodic Rock scene. Was there never any temptation to try writing with some of these people?

Mario: I can't live without writing songs, I do it almost every day and I have tons of unpublished songs and ideas. Recently I've co-written three songs with Alessandro Del Vecchio for the new Kelly Keeling album, out this month, and it looks like it will happen again in the near future with other artists. At the moment I'm working on a new project and writing songs every week with my dear friend David Reece. We regularly meet in my studio and we set our ideas free with a guitar in my hands… and that's for me one of the best ways to write songs and share our creativity.

Why the decision to cover Eric Clapton's 'Bad Love'?

J: We've loved playing cover songs for many years, so when Mario came to the studio bringing a well-know Clapton song, we were surprised to discover that this song was a perfect fit for our style. I think it's an incredible Hard Rock tune from the 80s. We felt very comfortable working on it and we tried to make an original arrangement and at the same time maintain our own style. I immediately loved the way we arranged and recorded that song.

In what way do you think the band has progressed from 'One Ticket To Paradise'?

M: As Josh already said before, this period between 'One Ticket To Paradise' and this new album, 'Dirty Italian Job', has been very busy. We did a lot of collaborations and shows and personally I've had the chance to work both as guitarist and producer on many records. All this time helped us to improve our personal background and get us ready to make the album we've always dreamed of releasing; exactly what we had in our mind. That's why I feel a kind of evolution from our previous records and I agree with all those people who say this is our more mature album. Moreover 'DIJ' has been created and produced in my studio from scratch and it's great when you have complete control of every step during the production process. We also replaced our ex-bass player, and the new one, Stefano Skool Scola, has contributed a lot to improve our sounds and the harmony inside the band. We are friends before all and I think you can feel it by listening to the album.

There's still a big Bon Jovi influence in some of the songs – sometimes a little too close for comfort, as with 'Second Hand Love' which more than tips a hat to 'Wanted: Dead Or Alive'. Do you find the Bon Jovi comparisons a help or a hindrance?

J: I love the New Jersey music scene, where a part of my musical inspiration comes from such artists like Bruce Springsteen, Southside Johnny and John Bon Jovi; I have always had the greatest admiration for him, he was one of my favourite singers back in the 80s and an extraordinary example of a self-made businessman. In fact, in his successful music career that has lasted more than thirty years, Bon Jovi has always kept an incredible influence on multiple genres of music – including Country – so I can frankly say that being compared to him could be a helping hand to find new listeners through Bon Jovi's lovers. However it was just singing a lot of songs, exploring different genres of music that gave me the colour and a rough tone, for someone defined as our trademark. Words that always keep me working.

Which bands would you say are the main influences for Hungryheart?

M: We started playing live in the north of Italy at the end of 90s; at the beginning we used to play cover songs by Danger Danger, Whitesnake, Tyketto, Firehouse, Badlands, Bad English and many others… so those bands are for sure our main influence! But you can also find traces of 70s Rock and West Coast in our songs.

What was the thinking behind choosing 'Shoreline' as the first video?

J: We were two young souls when me and Mario used to run away from the small town to the river, with a pocket full of dreams and two dusty acoustic guitar on our backs, It's a very special place where we grew up and it's one of the largest river here in Italy. A lot of our own songs have been written there, so when we decided a place to realise our first video about the single 'Shoreline', we had no hesitation in coming back here, it was almost a natural choice. About the shoot...I remember when it was filmed, it was a hot and humid day, but nobody really seemed to care, everything seemed right from the moment we arrived. The 'Shoreline' video was shot in a day by Riccardo Bernardi and Daniele Vendola with an innovative throw-and-shoot flying drone camera. It was a great experience.

What is the live scene like in Italy – do you get to play much? And what about opportunities outside Italy?

M: The live scene in Italy nowadays is not good, especially if you are not a tribute or cover band. Fortunately we've been doing a lot of shows in the last few years, we shared the stage with bands and artists like Mitch Malloy and House of Lords and we played at many summer festivals and venues. During the wintertime we usually played some unplugged gigs in smaller clubs around Italy. Now we have some shows in Italy planned during the summer and then we'll tour in Holland, Germany and Switzerland next October. We are also working to tour in other countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal and for sure England! And we hope more to come…

What are the plans for the band over the next twelve months?

J: The album was certainly a step forward and we're more than happy with the end result. We are really proud to finally introduce the new songs to our fans, so now we're working to promote the album heavily by playing a number of shows all over the Europe. Check out for Hunhryheart's upcoming gigs at www.hungryheartofficial.com. We're also planning to release another single from the new album – stay tuned for more news!

The New Frontiers of Female Fronted Hard Rock & Heavy Metal

Thankfully in 2015, and as it should always have been, Hard Rock and Metal are equal opportunity employers, countless bands proving that the girls are as ready and able as the boys to produce some of the finest music we could hope for. With Frontiers Records one of the many labels now championing this new found thirst for female fronted bands, Fireworks sent out a trio of our crack reporters to investigate some of the releases the label has in store, with one coming from a new name on the block, one from a well known singer heading out on her own for the first time and one from a long established and respected outfit…

Caterina Nix of Chaos Magic talks to Bruce E.J. Atkinson…

Where are you from and when did you start singing?

I'm from Santiago, Chile. I lead a pretty "normal" lifestyle, I'm a lawyer, I'm a quiet creature, I don't drink, don't smoke and try to work out as much as I can. I started singing at a very young age… it always seemed like a natural thing for me, a way to express myself, even though I had no idea if I sounded good or not. Never really cared about that, not even now! (laughs) I just sing, if people like it, great, if they don't, great, I don't care.

Has it been difficult establishing yourself as a singer in Chile?

Well, it's hard enough to try and make it as a singer, even more when it comes to a woman trying to make it in Metal music. IT IS HARD. Not only in Chile, but everywhere I guess… You have to take a lot of shit, criticism, sexism, insults, ugly rumours and prejudice. But I have never let anything bring me down. I remind myself everyday of what I'm worth and thank the universe for everything that has been given to me. I just keep fighting.

You first came to prominence with the Metal crowd through Timo Tolkki, and his Avalon musical project. At that time, did you know that you would end up being the centre of this fantastic excursion?

In fact, Chaos Magic was recorded before my participation in Avalon. It seemed like a good way of putting me out there since not a lot of people knew who I was. It was a good opportunity to create curiosity around me and the project.

Did you co-write with Timo for the Chaos Magic debut, or has he handled all the writing?

This time, he handled all the writing. He was the one who wrote both the songs and the lyrics. I only made minor changes to a few lyrics and came up with a few names for the songs and the name of the album. If there's a second album, I'll definitely write a few songs of my own.

How would you describe the music we will be listening to on this beautiful debut of Chaos Magic?

I think this music is beautiful, ethereal, catchy and powerful. The album has it all; calm quiet moments and strong, highly orchestrated pieces. For me, it was a delight singing these songs. It was a good challenge.

Were you working side by side with everyone else?

I was in Chile and Timo was in Finland. He sent me the demo versions of the songs and then I sent him the song sang by me for his approval. It was much easier than I would have expected. Thankfully he liked my interpretation and there wasn't much he wanted to change. Then he worked with Jammi on the drums and finished the music and the engineering.

Are you planning on taking this project on the road?

That's gonna depend on a few factors, like the reception the album has among the fans, so It's a bit soon to know. For now, I'm planning a few gigs in Chile – without Timo for the moment – and hopefully I can book a few international shows eventually, which would be amazing!

Angelica Rylin of The Murder Of My Sweet talks to Brent Rusche…

What or who inspired you to get involved in the world of Progressive Hard Rock and Heavy Metal and how have they helped inspire you musical path and the music of The Murder Of My Sweet?

I was a big fan of Mind's Eye before I met Daniel [*Flores, The Murder Of My Sweet drummer, keyboard player and mainman*] and working with him has only intrigued me more to get involved in that genre. I'm not sure 'Beth Out Of Hell' is a particularly Progressive album though. I mean you get a sort of Progressive feel that probably comes from the variation of songs and not so much from an instrumental point of view. In my opinion we're even more cinematic on this album than on our first two. Daniel writes the music and he has developed his own sound over the years and I can hear snippets of harmonies or melodies that reminds me of something from one of the Mind's Eye albums. To me it adds icing on the cake.

You've done a lot of singing for movies and television, is that different from performing with a band?

Emotionally I always put 100% into my performance no matter the task. But in terms of performing in the studio or on stage you have the visual aspect as well. In the studio you only have to worry about your technique but on stage or in front of a camera there are people in the audience to interact with, cables on the floor to trip over and sometimes several cameras to keep track off. It's a whole different experience. You need to be good at multitasking!

Was the concept for 'Beth Out Of Hell' a collective effort of the band or the brainchild of Daniel Flores?

Daniel presented the initial idea for 'Beth…' to me on New Year's Eve a few years back when we were still working on 'Bye Bye Lullaby'. We were both so intrigued by the potential of the story and it became its own entity that just wouldn't let us be. We had to make something of it and so we decided to write the last three songs of the album as an introduction to this project. A *prologue,* we ended up calling it. We knew before we started what the album would consist of and how the story would unravel, the tricky

Veronica Freeman of The V talks to Ian Johnson

Your new album is a mixture of Rock, Hard Rock, Metal, AOR which you pull off wonderfully. As you're primarily know as a Metal singer, was it hard for you to switch to these different styles, or did you find it a challenge that you looked forward to?

Both! Now, when I am singing in the shower, which I indeed do, I sound more like the way you hear me singing on the solo 'Now or Never' record. *However,* to perform that in the studio was quite the challenge. I have such muscle memory, if you will, when it comes to my whole approach to recording the Metal music and I really had to be "put in check" now and again when it came to the approach or aggression I wanted to bring to this recording. It was indeed challenging and many a box of Kleenex were purchased, many a nail chipped as my fist hit the wall and mass quantities of fermented grapes were consumed after the job was done! And that's how I like it!

Did you have to learn to sing in a different way for this album?

The truth is I did have to learn a different approach but the power still needed to be there. At times that presented a challenge because it is very natural for me to have that aggressive, yet not guttural growl but to smooth it out a bit. Retaining the power and emotion was the trick, it took a while for me and then it became a lot easier and a lot less stress on those vocal chords.

Who wrote the songs for the new album and did you have a lot of input with the writing process?

This was one of the few times where I did quite a few numbers from other song writers. Initially Pete Wells and I had quite a few songs that were much too melodic for Benedictum and we used to joke about how much fun it would be to really develop them into something some day. So it was a blast to be able to do just that during the creation of this album. Songs like 'Line in the Sand', 'Star Shine', 'L.O.V.E.' and 'Spellbound' are ones we had the pleasure of doing on the record. Then to have a few songs from Nigel Baily, Jerry Dixon, Age of Evil, to name a few, that too was different for me. It was kind of fun to create an interpretation of someone else's music and lyrics.

On the new CD you get to work with Tony Martin and Leather Leone, both of whom duet with you, Jeff Pilson, Mike LePond, Michael Sweet, Michael Harris and many more. What was it like working with these very talented musicians?

A lot of people that were on the record of course, due to location etc, did the tracks and sent them in. So I didn't have that personal "in the studio" experience with everyone but I most certainly did enjoy that crazy time I had with Leather Leone, she is the girl your parents warned you about! I love her for that. And a big thanks to everyone who stepped up to help out. I did get to go out to Boston and meet Michael Sweet when we did the two songs that he wrote, 'Again' and 'Love Should Be To Blame'. That was quite the experience because I had no idea about ANYTHING about those songs until I got there and had to record them the next day. Was a lot of pressure but I think I grew from it as an artist and I love the tunes! My Benedictum brothers were on the record - Rikard Stjernquist did the bed track drums for the initial recordings, Pete Wells' solos and songs can be found throughout and Aric Avina plays the bass on 'Kiss My Lips', so they were there. I also want to thank all of my KickStarter supporters who helped me with those many cost overruns on this record! AMAZING people….

What comes next for you Veronica?

Shows I hope. Playing the HRH AOR in March of 2016 and look to build from there!

part was to put it all together. We did a lot of research and basically lived in the studio for weeks at times. I've always been fascinated by the concept of storytelling in books, movies, video games and music. I'm allured by the idea of creating another reality and getting lost in that world for a while. For me that was the most rewarding moments of the process! I think it's a brilliant way to use your imagination and when you listen to our music and my lyrics I want you to be able to close your eyes and visualise the story like it's happening right in front of you. We've always used big cinematic arrangements on our albums but there was a huge difference in how we wrote them this time. Since this is a story driven album every musical arrangement had to be customised and adapted to the lyrics. You must be able to feel the story as well as hearing it. So Daniel and I had to work really close on this album and basically be by each other's side all the time and let the music and the story grow by one another. A song like '*Death Of A Movie Star (Divanity)*' took us several months to finish and 'Beth Out Of Hell' has thirteen songs like that.

What aspects of the band do you think have improved in the three years since the last album?

Well, we've changed the line-up with a new bass player but other than that I know we've all grown immensely as musicians. Daniel really put himself out there and pushed his boundaries on how to compose an album like this. I've become a better singer and more confident in my song writing and Christopher has developed some mad technical skills. His guitar parts on this album blew me away when I first heard them and I know all of you who have wanted us to include more guitar solos have something to look forward to. You won't be disappointed!

Are there plans to tour in support of 'Beth Out Of Hell' and if so, how would you present it?

To take this album on tour would be a dream come true but in reality a huge operation. We would do the whole album in its entirety and we'd definitely include visual aspects, like a big movie screen as a backdrop. We worked with a very talented guy for both our lyric and music video, Ragnar Elfhag, who has tons of great and sometimes crazy ideas that I know would be just right for this type of live show. I'm a strong believer that dreams can come true so I look forward to the day!

With the current number of female-fronted Hard Rock and Heavy Metal bands at an all time high, what factors do you think are responsible for this dramatic rise in popularity?

Perhaps the general mass has finally embraced the fact that women are a part of the Hard Rock and Heavy Metal scene. We've had to fight for our right to belong for such a long time and perhaps our hard work inspires other women to get into the business. Come on, it's 2015 and people have to get over the fact that there is a woman and not a man behind the mic.

For more about these artists, visit www.frontiers.it

Californian hard-rock band Buckcherry is due to release their 7th studio album, 'Rock N Roll', on 21st August. Sophie Brownlee caught up with guitarist Keith Nelson to talk song-writing, music streaming and touring.

In 2014 you released the 'F#ck' EP; how was that compared to doing a full-length album?

We had been throwing around the idea of doing an EP for quite some time. We had just come off making the 'Confessions' record and it had a very heavy subject matter. Doing the 'F#ck' EP was a perfect excuse to let it all hang out, be irreverent, and start our own record label. It wasn't that much different, except that it had less songs.

What kind of musicians do you currently find inspiring?

It's very inspiring to see artists in any genre going out every night and actually playing live, without the aid of pre-recorded tracks. We've never used tracks but sadly an overwhelmingly large number of people do that these days.

How has Buckcherry has evolved over the years in terms of sound and style, and has any evolution been purposely taken or been more a natural move or change?

I think we've evolved as song writers and musicians. We play so many shows together that you can't help but get more comfortable with each other and find the spot where you fit in. Any evolution is complete happenstance; we never sit down and try to come up with a new direction, we just do what we do, which is write, record, and play as a live Rock and Roll band.

I think we make genuine records and the sound evolves naturally. Life changes. Our circumstances change. It's going to come out in the music and it's going to come out in the lyrics. On this record we added some horns and some keyboards at places we thought could really work well in the songs. I think as long as we keep making genuine records, our fans will get it and go on that journey with us. They know we're not bullshitting them.

How did the song-writing work between you and Josh Todd for this album?

It's my belief that it always starts with a beat. I look at the song-writing process as trying to inspire a thought or a feeling based on the music alone. I send my ideas over to Josh, he writes what inspires him to that music and then we get together with the band and beat it around until it's a song. Other times Josh will come up with vocal lyrics and a melody, and from there I try to do it justice and come up with the most interesting musical counterpart. There's no set way to do it, the ideas start flowing and we go with it.

Do you often end up with more tracks than you need for an album?

We write a lot of songs for every record. Sometimes, some songs just aren't any good. We've learned to take the best part out of a song that might not be working and salvage it to make something else. At the end of the recording process, it's pretty obvious which songs make up a record and which songs don't fit in.

Is there a main theme or any form of story or conceptual idea behind this album?

Absolutely not. We had made the 'Confessions' record which had a theme and the 'F#ck' EP which had a theme. For this one we were just trying to write the best songs we could, that accurately represent exactly where we are as people and as musicians.

How does the finished album compare to what you had in mind when you first started working on it?

I didn't really have a preconceived notion of what was going to happen. If you ask me now, in the past, and in the future, I will always believe that the last record we made was our best.

What do you enjoy most about being on tour and what is your single best or favourite memory from being on tour?

The most exciting thing about being on the road, honestly, is playing the shows. That said there have been so many incredible memories from being on tour. Hanging out with the entire band of AC/DC after we opened for them for about two weeks' worth of shows? Priceless. Meeting James Brown? Incredible. How do you top those moments?

What are your thoughts on music streaming services?

Streaming is the future, at least for now, and anyone who tries to deny that really has their head in the sand. But it's the live experience that you just can't replicate, even if the show is streaming live into your living room or on your smart phone, it's still not like being in the venue with the band and other fans.

There are a lot of things about streaming that need to be figured out. Of course the song writers and the artists need to be compensated for their talents, but to whine about that at this point is to be a part of the problem not the solution. We're not going to stop streaming or illegal file-sharing and I think if labels and music publishers were really concerned about their artists they'd get this shit figured out sooner rather than later. The upside is that more people than ever are listening to music, across all genres, and getting exposed to stuff they normally wouldn't get exposed to. And that's good for all of us.

How did you hone your guitar sound/skills and how would you describe the way that you play?

I just followed my influences…I was the kid looking at magazines trying to figure out what kind of amps and guitars my idols were using, and I followed suit. Thankfully my idols had impeccable taste!

It's hard to talk about your own guitar playing, but I would say that the song rules everything I do on the guitar. It's got to serve the song first. I like writing songs and guitar parts that are memorable. I've never been one of those guitar shop noodles that can burn up and down the neck and I never tried to be. A big part of getting your own identity on the guitar is knowing what you're capable of and what is beyond your grasp. I stay in my wheelhouse and thankfully I'm in a band with an incredible guitar partner. We balance each other out quite nicely.

What do you see in the future for Buckcherry?

I see more touring, more records, and building our worldwide fan-base. We have the best jobs in the world and we don't take that for granted. If we are not in your town now, we will be soon.

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LYNCH MOB

It's been a productive year for guitarist George Lynch, he not only releases the new Lynch Mob album 'Rebel' at the end of the month – their second studio album in less than a year - he's also recorded CDs with projects KXM (with Korn drummer Ray Luzier and King's X singer/bassist Doug Pinnick), Sweet & Lynch (with Stryper's Michael Sweet) and a film related album under the name of Shadow Nation. Not content with those, the mercurial former Dokken axeman is literally about to start another record within minutes of my call to talk about Lynch Mob's 'Rebel'.

"We're loading in to start a recording session for a new album," George states nonchalantly. "I'm sitting here waiting for the studio to open, so I'll be doing a couple of things at once here, but I'll try to stay focused. This project is called The Infidels and it's 'Pancho' Tomaselli from War, Angelo Moore from Fishbone on vocals, sax, theramin, keyboards and circus clown, and Chris Moore on drums. We're starting that today, and the way the music is going it sounds like James Brown meets Mahavishnu Orchestra meets George Lynch, I think that's pretty accurate," laughs the guitarist.

Never ones to take the expected route, George and singer Oni Logan have a broad palette when it comes to making Lynch Mob records, it seems the plan is to not make any album exactly like the last one.

"The aim was to take the basic Lynch Mob formula, and without exactly abandoning it, just build on it and go outside it and explore a little more. Every record we do I think we're taking that basic formula and expanding it, pushing the envelope a little bit. It's like a tree sprouting branches, but they're still attached to the trunk. The bottom line is that we're not in a laboratory and we're not Rock scientists who plan out every move we're going to make, in all honesty it's completely spontaneous and just a result of the chemistry between Oni and myself. That's basically it, if I surround myself with different musicians I become a chameleon in the depths of that environment. In The Infidels I'm not the same composer or guitarist that I am in the context of Lynch Mob. Lynch Mob is just a certain thing that happens when we get together, we don't think about it too hard, we don't need to!"

Lyrically the album takes a deeper stance than previous Lynch Mob releases. Lynch pauses momentarily when I mention it.

"That's really interesting," he begins. "Oni and I have been playing together for a lot of years on and off and he became aware that I'd been involved in political and social justice issues for a lot of time and had been frustrated by my inability to express myself and address those issues in my music. It's a hard thing for me to do. I'm not a gifted lyricist and a poet like Oni is, and I'm not a singer, so I'm really dependent on my singers to understand where I'm coming from and maybe sympathise with my thought processes, and if they don't then there's nothing I can do about that. In recent years Oni has been listening to and talking to me about these things and seems to have an understanding and be able to express his feelings about the issues, or maybe collectively the band's feelings about these issues. I'm really appreciative that he did that and I'm really happy that it happened. There are more serious issues that I deal with in other projects that I'm involved with – The Infidels for example – now *that's* a political band. Shadow Train, a band that I'm involved are based around a documentary I did called Shadow Nation, their lyrics are also very political and that's the whole driving vehicle behind the band, the lyrics are the most important thing in the music. So I'm really happy that Oni feels the way he does and was able to express himself so eloquently and in a way that aligns very well with what I believe and what I feel is important to put out there, and for our music to be a vehicle for. I did an album called KXM with Ray Luzier and Doug Pinnick and the same kind of issues cropped up where there were certain things I wanted to express in the music. The problem with that is that Doug is also very opinionated and being the voice of the band he writes most of the lyrics. He's a Libertarian, which is pretty much diametrically opposed to what I'm thinking, and then the video director was also Libertarian, so we had some issues there. I was thinking "Do I even want to be in this video? This is nothing to do with what I believe or what I think!" It's tricky sometimes to have any kind of control when you're not the person with the voice or the microphone! In the case of Lynch Mob it was a wonderful evolution of Oni's growth as a person, and my own path, and they sort of converged. It was really great. He just went ahead and wrote the lyrics on his own, and when I heard them I just went "Wow! Where is this coming from? I can get behind this!" To me it just lends a lot more weight to the music when it's less superficial and generic."

'Rebel' has been recorded with the help of long-time friend and Dokken/T&N bandmate Jeff Pilson and former drummer Brian Tichy, strangely not the rhythm section currently in the band. The reasons are manifold.

"Well, when we put this record together Sean McNabb and Jimmy D'Anda were not yet in the band," explains Lynch simply. "We only put the live band together later after we'd finished the record, they weren't even on our radar at that point. Jeff is my favourite Rock bass player of all time, and of course we have this long, long history, so he understand the music that we write together and the music that I write on my own, he gets it, he understands where it's coming from because we've been working together off and on for thirty-five years or something. He lives right down the street from me and he has a great studio, and he loves doing it. He's been playing in Foreigner for twelve years so when he gets the chance to do something a little beefier, he jumps at it, we love working together. He's one of the few guys in this genre of Rock who can do what he does. He gets focused on his edgy tone and he has this certain groove that's just behind the beat, he's a superlative musician, he's very bright and his note choices are fantastic, he's the ultimate bass player for this kind of music."

I mention that Jeff's bass on this album is the best he's ever sounded on record.

"That's great, I'll tell him you said that," replies the guitarist. "I think on many records these days the bass is there but it's not actually on its own, holding its own space like the guitar is or the drums are. It should be noticeable and doing its own thing in the whole sound, like back in the day with Jack Bruce and John Entwistle, contributing its own element and giving the music another layer, and that's what Jeff does on this record. We talked about old three-piece bands a lot, in the old days the bass would have a lot of distortion on it, amp distortion from big old tube amps, just like a guitar player does, and I think that made it sound fuller. Nowadays bass players play more clean and with a pristine tone, they don't use tubes and stuff. I prefer the dirty, grungy thing that bass players used to do, and Jeff gets that."

Going back to the band evolving with each album, Lynch has recently become acutely aware that there are certain expectations with any record he appears on, and it's a fine line between having a pioneering spirit and disappointing the fans who made his name. Is he wary of straying too far from those expectations?

"Well, I *have* been at times," he says thoughtfully, "and then I did the Sweet & Lynch record, which seemed to satisfy a lot of people who wanted me to do a throwback record, one stylistically closer to where I came from in the eighties. I didn't even know if I could still do that because a lot of my ideas and my playing had just kinda changed, but I think it worked out well and I vindicated myself on that level, at least for now!" he says mischievously.

At recent shows he's been shying away from those ESP guitars with gimmicky designs that he became known for, particularly the much photographed Tiger, even using a Les

Paul for much of the recent Frontiers Rock Festival set. "I change around quite a lot, I'm all over the map," counters the guitarist. "I go through phases. Right now I'm using my Telecaster in the studio, I've put the Les Paul away. I've just bought a Firebird so at the moment I'm all over that, but the bottom line is I'm still playing my Tiger and a couple of the older ESP's, they're generally what I use most of the time, especially my Tiger, but like a lot of guitarists I thrive off of tone questing and trying new things, it keeps life interesting. I was leaning on the Les Paul pretty heavily on that show, and in fact the rest of the Lynch Mob US tour that we did was pretty much two-thirds Les Paul, one third Tiger."

A quick look at the Lynch Mob Wikipedia page shows that besides Lynch there have been over half a dozen singers, bassists and drummers that have gone through the band's ranks. Lynch finds the constant changes frustrating and detrimental to any forward motion. Another long pause prefaces his thoughtful explanation.

"It's always been my dream from the inception of Lynch Mob, and even in Dokken and my formative years in bands in the early seventies, for a line-up that stays together. You're a band of brothers, you're family and you have relationships, you're meant to go through things together and have your friends beside you on your journey. It always hurts to go through those changes and most of them have been beyond my control, there are many different reasons, personal reasons with different band members. In later years it's been friction or control issues, but without the big money to hold you together it's recently become a world of independent contractors, people have mortgages and bills and children, and the business has basically become a job, so when someone offers you a little more money that's where you go. That's happened quite often in the context of this band, and also Lynch Mob isn't a big enough band to sustain the band permanently and pay everyone's bills, it's not Korn or Van Halen or anyone like that. We'll go do a tour and then we won't do anything for a while, then we'll go do a record and there aren't great amounts of money in that either. It's not a band that will sustain everybody and keep them all afloat, so people are in multiple bands and that leads to them having to make decisions that lead them in different directions. For now there's Sean McNabb, Jimmy D'Anda, myself and Oni and we're great friends and do some wonderful shows, they're all great players and I think it's the best we've sounded since the inception of the band. At the moment everybody's happy, we have a lot of dates lined up until November, so we hope the album does well and we can continue to do what we do."

Since their appearance at Firefest in 2010, some Lynch Mob shows in Europe have been cancelled, including a full tour and an appearance at Sweden Rock, something George is obviously frustrated about.

"It's difficult with Lynch Mob not being a super earning band, it's hard to go over there and make any money. Unfortunately it's not like we're twenty-five years old and we can hop on a cheap flight and go stay in hostels or with friends, we're older guys and need to look after ourselves better and still go home and pay some bills afterwards. We had a tour set up last year and we had to cancel it, it was about a month and we had half a dozen festivals, it looked great on paper, but at the end of the day there was no money there. The dollar was struggling so everything cost more, it's not like we're Bon Jovi, going over there on our private jet and staying at the Four Seasons. Going over there has to make some kind of financial sense. We had Sweden Rock and Hellfest, and some dates with Tesla which looked great, and then the cost of everything went sky high, just the cost of flights was ridiculous. We had a month of hotels to pay for so they said the only way to make it work was to room up, but at sixty years old I think I'm too old to start sharing a bed with another man. We looked at the figures and the difference between sharing a room and not sharing a room was the difference between making a small profit and not making anything, so I figured at my age I don't need to do that. We'd be driving ourselves with no crew, travelling across another continent that we're not that familiar with, at our ages it would be tough financially and tough on the body. I don't mind working hard but two weeks rehearsals and four weeks of shows for no money is just too much when you have six kids and six grandkids, I would have made $5K rather than the $15K I would have made staying at home. We'll keep trying but it's tricky, that Italy show was just a one-off show, we played one show and then came home, it was very bizarre."

Despite the number of projects he's involved with, the opportunities to play live are virtually non-existent for anything outside of Lynch Mob. Even the success of Sweet & Lynch is unlikely to result in a tour.

"No," he agrees," but we *are* talking about doing another record next year. With all these other projects that I'm doing it's very difficult to take any of them out on tour, Lynch Mob is my only regular touring band but we're also doing another KXM record and are hoping to carve out a month to take that on the road. I'm making that a prerequisite for making another record because we had so much pressure to go out and play, but weren't able to pull it off last year. We feel that we really need to make that happen. It's not a real band unless you go out there and do it live, so we'll definitely make sure we find a way to do that."

With those positive words George Lynch went off to make his sixth record in the last twelve months. If hard work counts for anything, George and Lynch Mob will have many more records and tours to come.

GUS G

Interview by Mónica Castedo-López

Young, talented, humble and thankful. That is how Ozzy and Firewind guitarist Gus G rolls as he returns with his sophomore vocal solo album on Century Media, the powerful 'Brand New Revolution'. Early in June, yours truly met up with the Greek guitar god at a London location to discuss the release and its impressive list of personnel, including Jay Ruston (Anthrax, Stone Sour) and Mike Fraser (AC/DC, Aerosmith, Van Halen), as well as singers Jeff Scott Soto, Mats Levén, Elize Ryd and Jacob Bunton.

Last year you released your first solo album. Now you are back with 'Brand New Revolution'. Brand new revolution against what?

Anything you want it to be. A musical revolution? Hopefully! I don't know. It's a good title for a song that calls for an album title. I like the vibe of that track and the lyrics. You can translate that into a situation that may express you. People back home in Greece ask if I wrote that about Greece. The answer is not really, but if somebody feels connected to that, cool. It almost feels like the world is boiling up to some sort of thing right now and it needs some sort of revolution. If that connects with people, it's good. Everybody needs a musical anthem.

In our first interview a few years back you stated you didn't want to release an instrumental album, and the debut had only two instrumental tracks. The new release has one, 'The Quest'.

I am not opposed to instrumental records. I like them and I'll never say never. I just don't think I will ever do one. It's been done, all the classic instrumental albums: Jeff Beck, Joe Satriani, Vai, Yngwie, they've all done iconic albums. I like vocal songs that speak to people, that speak to me directly. The instrumentals is something that is great, it serves a purpose, but it's very easy to get bored after a while, even me who is a guitar player and I love hearing guitar.

Different people, different views. You did a great job on 'The Quest'.

That doesn't apply to that instrumental track! [laughs] I will not do instrumental unless I think it's cool and that is why I included this one. I wrote a couple more instrumentals for the record but I didn't think they were good enough so I didn't put them in there. But this one I felt was strong, I thought it was a good opener for the record too. A lot of people expect me, as a guitar player, to go out there with full blasting guitar shredding, so here it is for you guitar freaks, the opening track, and then let's move on with the songs.

You mentioned that the first album had many colours and this one has many colours as well, lots of different tempos, some songs are acoustic, some are more aggressive and you have Matts Levén, Jeff Scott Soto and Jacob Bunton again. What is the main difference between 'I Am The Fire' and 'Brand New Revolution'?

I think it's really an extension of the first album. Musically it is not that far away and it still has the same vibe. I kept on writing with Jacob after the first album. I sent him more stuff. The track 'Brand New Revolution' was written last year but the record label didn't want to include it so I said I'd keep it for the next one. I liked the title of the track, it was very anthemic and I thought that is my album title for the next one. I had that mind set and I had a lot of material lying around very quickly after the first album was finished.

Tell us how you work. Do you get some ideas and then send them to Jacob?

I usually do the demos in my home studio, program the drums and play bass, guitar, etc and then I send them to Jacob. He will tell me straight up and a few days later he sends me his ideas. I like working fast. Jacob is a hit maker and writes for a lot of people, not only in the Rock world but also in the Pop world where he has a lot of hits on the radio in America. I remember him getting me 'Burn' very quickly. He insisted that should be the first single and he was right, it has a very American radio vibe.

How did you get to work with Jacob in the first place?

Jay Ruston introduced me to him because they're friends. Jay is an amazing guy and he put me in touch with all these amazing people. I had the music to 'Just Can't Let Go' and I sent it to Jacob and asked him to give it a try. When he sent it back to me I was wowed! This guy is not only a great writer, he's a good singer as well.

You have Elize Ryd, the singer in Amaranthe, doing a song on the album. Tell us how that came about.

I'm a big fan of hers. She's one of the greatest singers in our genre right now. I love her vibe and what she does. She reminds me of a Metal Kate Bush. She has this Pop background, her vocals do sound very Pop and she has all these choreographed things. I haven't seen any other girl do that in heavier bands. Her voice is sweet but also has balls. I think she is very unique. Amaranthe have the same video director that I have, Patric Ullaeus, so Patric made the connection. I sent her the track and she loved it.

How are you going to promote the album? Are you going on tour soon?

Yes, I am doing some shows with Hellyeah in Germany and Holland next week, I'm doing some festivals in July and then we haven't figured anything yet for the UK but of course I'll come back. I'm getting offers now so I'm hoping it will be in September, otherwise it will have to be at the tail end of the year. I'm getting offers now for American tours. Then I have some Ozzy shows in Japan and Mexico in August.

How do you feel when you work on your own stuff and then go back to the Ozzy camp?

It's a different world. In my stuff I'm the boss and I call my own shots. With Ozzy I follow the team, I'm part of that, the guy that plays guitar and I don't worry about stuff, I have fun. In Ozzy my role is to play the best way I can. My solo work is my identity, it's who I am.

Has Ozzy asked you to write some songs for a forthcoming album, maybe?

We haven't talked about that. I don't think he knows what he's going to do yet. We wrote a couple of songs a few years ago when we were on the road and he said he wants to include them when he does an album. He was playing me some of the demos he's been working on with Steve Stevens. I don't really know what is going to happen. I think they'll have Black Sabbath in the future first. I think they'll do a tour next year and maybe another album.

What is happening with Firewind?

It's still on hiatus because I'm busy with this now, but I'm planning to make a comeback with the band, probably after this, end of 2016/early 2017, it depends how long this tour takes. If there's enough interest for me to keep touring, I will. If not, then I'll go back into writing some more Firewind stuff again.

Luca Turilli's Rhapsody are back with their self-styled Cinematic Metal on 'Prometheus: Symphonia Ignis Divinus'. It's a Symphonic monster of a record, more orchestral than Metal. A very animated Turilli chatted to Duncan Jamieson about the time and effort that went into the making of this opus, injured guitarists, surviving cancer and his message behind the songs.

It's a hugely ambitious album which obviously took a long time to produce.

We invested a lot of time for composition. It took seven months. I wanted the orchestra to sound more realistic. On the last album 'Ascending To Affinity' I programmed the orchestra. This time I wanted to record every little part with my hands on a keyboard, which isn't easy for a guy who wasn't a born keyboard player. I'm happy with the result. It's the most satisfying record I've made. I recorded my solos in Italy. Dominique Leurquin (the other guitarist) recorded his solos in France and then the vocals and choirs were recorded in Munich, Germany. It took over fifty days to mix the album; it was difficult to mix all the different aspects. We pre-mixed all the orchestral parts in my studio here in Italy and then sent it to Germany. It was a real fight with the frequencies between the guitars and orchestra and so on. In the end I do it all just for me, I invest so much time. I'm the first fan of my own music, I want to make the kind of music I want to listen to. Your own creativity is the only limit to what can be achieved.

There's particular care taken with the choirs as they differ in sound considerably from track to track.

You're right. There were three kinds of choirs on this record. The first we have is an epic one, with lots of voices. For me, it's the voices on a record that give the emotion. The second is a typical Heavy Metal choir. For that you need only four or five Metal singers who can sing powerfully. We were lucky to have Ralph Scheepers (Primal Fear), David Readman (Pink Cream 69) and Dan Lucas (KARO) collaborating here. The third type of choir is an Operatic, Classical one. Here you don't need so many voices. Once I made an album with sixty people doing the Operatic part but in the end that wasn't so satisfactory. Now, if you compare the sound quality of a sound sample with a large choir, when you mix it in the studio then even with the London Orchestra it doesn't sound so good as you need more definition and the same applies to a choir. We had to have two singers sing over the top to give the sound clarity or else the voices blending together can sound muddy, almost fake. So now, I take six or seven voices singing the parts each time. I'm very interested in polyphonic voices, this way you can get a very good effect. We had two singers Previn Moore from Vienna and Bridget Fogle from Germany as the main voices with other voices around them, sometimes more and sometimes fewer voices. There's even Holy, Gregorian choirs on there.

The album is longer than previous Rhapsody records.

It was a very difficult decision to create an album of seventy minutes. In the past I haven't wanted to have too much music on one album – I'm not making music in a commercial, typical Heavy Metal way – I wondered if it was too ambitious but I really wanted to do these songs. There's also the variety of languages to make it diverse. There are songs in Latin, Italian and English.

You have Dominque Leurquin back after missing the last tour due to his awful hand injury. What difference has that made?

Oh Dominique! Oh my God! Oh My God! It happened just before the previous tour. For me, to be on stage without him was terrible. There was a big chance when it happened that he might never play guitar again but the miracle happened . The "will force" really worked and the doctors were really surprised how quickly he recovered. He's got back about ninety percent of what he was before and that's enough for Rhapsody!

There's been an evolution of Rhapsody's sound to bring you to this large orchestral, Cinematic record.

There has been a clear plan with Rhapsody's records. If you were to look at it graphically you would see how it's proceeded. Initially, it was more orchestral and Heavy Metal, then the next two, 'Rain Of A Thousand Flames' and ' Power Of The Dragonflame', were more Metal and then the next two, 'The Dark Secret' and 'Symphony Of Enchanted Lands Part II', were more orchestral. This one is more orchestral-based but you can't constrict me, I couldn't do it. It is Cinematic, Modern Classical music and the visual aspect is very important.

The next one will be more guitar-oriented. There's always melody, it's cathartic, epic and bombastic music. It's like a Nirvana experience for me! Transcendental! When I watch trailers for Hollywood, big budget movies with the big bombastic music, the deep voice over and all the best visuals in the film all shown together, I love that!

On previous albums there's been a unifying concept with your sagas. This time however, there's a wide variety of subject matter.

Yes, without the single saga there could be more sounds, different subjects. The message of the songs is very clear, it's hermetic, it's about spiritual evolution. I don't mean religion. When I wrote the sagas there was the superficial meaning of the saga but underneath was the spiritual message. I met Alex Staropoli (Rhapsody Of Fire guitarist) when I was fifteen or sixteen and he was say nineteen. We were interested in mind relaxation, meditative experience and psychic, supernatural possibilities. The Egyptian emerald tablet, alchemy, the primordial spiritual source, metaphysics, string theory, photon energy source; all these things interest me. I do yoga, simple breathing techniques to unblock the neural system. Those old myths, legends and secrets of the world have symbolism. There are spiritual messages that were passed down from the wise people back then; there are incredible truths in those stories. I have to tell you, in Rhapsody I have a very specific way of writing the songs. I write some titles and if I still like the title after two days then I start to think of the music.

We've mentioned the Cinematic aspect of your music. You've set up a music production company?

This is something fresh. It's with an American guy called Allen Morgan who has worked with big names like U2 and Taylor Swift. We'll supply orchestral parts needed for films. There's a contract in progress, I can't tell you too much about it now, but it's exciting. I've been very lucky with Rhapsody, having complete freedom in the sound I make. Only one time did a guy in a record company say we should do a song in a certain way to be a single. I can only do what's in my heart and soul. With Hollywood, it will be a little different as it will change depending on what is needed for the film.

In a world of instant gratification 'Prometheus' is a record that you find something new with each listen.

This is the best album in terms of recording I've made in twenty years. Please don't listen to it with silly little headphones on your laptop!

Blackmore's Night

For eighteen years now, ex-Deep Purple/Rainbow guitarist Ritchie Blackmore has, in tandem with his wife, vocalist Candice Night, released consistently excellent Renaissance themed albums under the name Blackmore's Night. The pair are very busy, with a series of dates in Europe, a brand new album out, a new release planned from Candice, plus several other notable things to discuss - including a return to Rock for Ritchie… James Gaden found out more.

I really like the new album 'All Our Yesterdays'. I loved the mix of stuff you have on here, it's a blend of instrumentals, upbeat stuff, cover versions, quieter moments… let's start with the title track. The press release suggests there is a theme going on.

R: Right, yes. What the hell is behind that?

C: (Laughs) It's one of our tavern songs, Ritchie always says you have the correct tempo when you can pick up a beer mug and swing along to it! We pay no attention to the drummer, it's simply down to swinging the beer mug. (laughs) We like to look back, through that veil of the past, hundreds of years ago. It's a fantasy, obviously it wasn't that great hundreds of years ago but living today, it's nice to incorporate elements from that different period. It also reflects on our past in this lifetime, the good times you've had and keeping that fire burning. We liked it and it ended up becoming the title track.

R: It's a salute to all the alcoholics.

You've followed it with a couple of instrumentals. The first one, I dread to think how I will pronounce this… 'Allan yn n fan'? I'm presuming that's Welsh?

C: We're not sure how to pronounce it either! (laughs)

R: You presume properly. It's a tip of the hat to my dad who came from there. I came from Weston Super Mare, on the border, most of my family are from the West Country, so we thought we'd give Wales an acknowledgment. I really liked it. We went in the studio one snowy day, because it was ridiculous in Long Island, New York, we couldn't get out of the house. Most of our instrumentals come from being inside on snowy days. We asked a few fans how to say it, but we got different answers. It basically means "Out there in the van". For most bands, all you do is spend time in the van, out there going places or out there mentally. It's interesting, because the melody was written by a German. So it's an Englishman, following a German's interpretation of a Welsh song. It's complicated, so I go back to drinking again! It's not easy to play, it's rigid, that's not my style, I like to play long notes and arpeggios. That was very abrupt and rigid, you have to be on your toes to play it, especially with the band. I was pleased with that one.

I really enjoyed 'Darker Shade Of Black' too, the Strat comes out and it's got a great feel about it. There's some beautiful vocals in the background, are those real choral voices or are they synthesised?

R: It could be Sarah Brightman… but we can't say anything! (laughs) We know Sarah, and we know her boyfriend very well. That was done again on another snowy day. It was a vague idea I had, and when I play my ideas to our producer, Pat Regan, if I see his eyes light up, we take it further. If he starts yawning, I know not to play it. He said it was a really good progression and asked what it was. I said it was a kind of lean on a Beethoven 'Moonlight Sonata' with a classical progression, it's very sparse with the violin playing. I originally just played the violin part on guitar and it worked. It's dynamic and the organ part was a tongue in cheek nod to 'Whiter Shade Of Pale', so I called it 'Darker Shade Of Black'. I have a warped sense of melody in my head. If I hear something and I'm inspired by it, I'll play something and ask if it sounds alike. People will usually say "No, that's nothing like it" but that's the way I was thinking. It's good and bad. If I want to learn a strict melody that's difficult, I have to consult with Candy. She has that kind of brain, she can remember every note.

> *"I'll probably do something next June, doing all the Rainbow and Purple songs for a few nights, maybe four nights. I don't know whether it'll be a festival or what yet, but I'll pick some people to do those old songs and jam some Rock N' Roll, that I would find exciting."*
>
> **Ritchie Blackmore**

C: I'm good at imitating, thank you for that compliment. (laughs) The improv side is all Ritchie, he can hear a song and think he's playing it back to you, but it's completely different.

R: I'm very bad at copying things. If I copied guitar solos in my early days, when I was 14 or 15, I'd copy the first bit and then just make the rest up. When I played with Jeff Beck, we were playing solos to each other, he'd have them down to the exact note, I'd always end up varying them. I'm not good at copying. I don't know if that's good or bad.

I think it's a good thing, it gives you a unique sound. When you play the Stratocaster, you have a specific sound all of your own.

R: Right, I suppose that's the good side of it. It's frustrating when I want to play something someone else has written note for note. I have to get the sheet music and I'm not a good reader. If I want to get every note right, I'm slow like a beginner when reading music.

You have some really good choices of cover versions here. I thought Candice did a tremendous job on Linda Ronstadt's 'Long Long Time'.

C: Thank you! We're very lucky that once or twice a week we'll grab some friends and go this this local restaurant which is very dark, they shut off all the lights and let us take over this back room and just pass around guitars and play old songs, new songs, songs we've forgotten and we'll try out stuff. Sometimes on nice days we've done it outside by a fire but most times we're in this old restaurant. We'll do songs we absolutely love and that was how we rediscovered 'Diamonds And Rust', 'Moonlight Shadow' was another one, it was great to just mess around with friends and see how they'd like it. Or they'd play one and we'd say "Oh my gosh, 'Celluloid Heroes', I haven't heard that for decades!" You can be reintroduced to songs like that and 'Long Long Time' was one of those.

You mentioned 'Moonlight Shadow' there, have you ever performed that before the version here on the record? I was sure I'd heard you do it.

C: It's funny, when we first did 'Shadow Of The Moon' 18 years ago, the title was inspired by 'Moonlight Shadow', Mike Oldfield and Maggie Reilly have always been an inspiration to us. Occasionally when Ritchie kicks the rest of the band off stage and it's just the two of us and we improvise some songs and take requests, 'Moonlight Shadow' is definitely one we've done in that format. We've not done it often, maybe four or five times. You may have been at one of those shows, or there could have been a bootleg of it on Youtube. We have played it, but it was never a song we rehearsed with the band to be in the setlist.

R: It's in my top ten all time favourite songs, I've always wanted to do it. It's hard to find a different angle to what Mike Oldfield did, he did such a good job on it and Maggie Reilly is a brilliant singer, so it was hard to do without just copying it. I think ours is a bit different.

The other one is 'I Got You Babe'. You've done it with Candice singing it by herself, I'm so conditioned to hearing it as a duet it surprised me, it works really well in this form.

R: We thought exactly the same. That's the way we've always done it when we've played it with friends, and we thought we should try it. Everyone seemed to like it, and then at first we laughed it off, thinking "No, we can't do that." But why not? I've always said this project is great because we can do anything we want. The next tune we do might be 'Wooly Bully'! We don't have that situation where the band say "I'm not doing that, I didn't write it, we're not going to make any money, what's the point…" The point is it's a great song! I've always loved it. Like you said, we thought there should be somebody else singing and we were wondering who we could get – but then we thought "Why?" It sounds great with Candy singing it alone.

Was it difficult for you to interpret Candice, with it being so well known as a duet, to sing it alone?

C: Once I got over the mental thing of thinking it had to be a duet, I realised the lyrics could easily be just a love song, one person singing about another, without having that back and forth thing. And ironically, Ritchie told me my voice and my range is actually lower than most of the male singers he has worked with, so I could do the male part as well as the female part! (laughs)

I also wanted to ask about 'Where Do We Go From Here', because you've effectively covered yourselves there, that first appeared in 'Ghost Of A Rose'.

C: When Ritchie changed the tempo of the song, I couldn't even imagine it, I thought the more melancholy version we did originally was perfect. But Ritchie said about this double time thing and making it more Rock, and I just couldn't hear it. Then he played me a backing track and it just clicked, it all made sense. We've been covering other people's songs a lot so after having Blackmore's Night for 18 years, it seemed fitting to cover ourselves. (laughs)

R: There's quite a few songs, when I look back, that I think we could have done better. 'Writing On The Wall' for definite, that's probably our worst song. I don't know what happened with that one. I think we were in a hurry to get out, left it to Pat and he thought we wanted a disco thing.

I have to say, I do like 'Writing On the Wall', but it's sound is very different to the rest of the album, it sounds a bit at odds with the rest of the material.

R: I think the idea is good, but the finished product is nothing like we wanted. We should do that one again.

C: I think what Ritchie explained to Pat and how Pat interpreted it turned out to be two different things, and at that point we needed to be delivering it to the record label and didn't really have chance to go back and make it what we wanted it to be.

You're a far stronger singer since the first album Candice, you have so much more range now.

R: Yeah, that comes from shouting at the kids. "Rory, put that down! Autumn, stop punching Rory." It's the first thing I hear in a morning.

C: (Laughs) Yeah, I couldn't have been shouting at you! But really, the voice is a muscle and after years of building it up it gains strength and I'm glad I can use that on the recent albums. When I listen back, I think "Oh, I can do so much better!" but back then, it had an innocence. I'd never sung front and centre before.

R: I felt the innocence was very good, it suited the first record.

You're touring Germany at the moment, but there's no UK dates at the moment. Will there be any planned this year?

C: Next year I think. We definitely wanted to do it, but the routings and the bookings of the halls just wouldn't work out, sometimes the logistics don't allow it. We even planned for the album to be out as we were touring here, but now it's out in September so we're doing sneak previews of these songs because nobody knows them yet! We love the UK and we're hoping next year will work out.

R: Especially if we can go to Glastonbury or somewhere like that. Not when the festival is there, obviously.

C: We'd like to do Scotland, we get fan letters from a lot of the UK. Wales would be nice, we never play Ireland… so the UK is a priority.

Candice, I heard you were working on a CD of lullabies. Is that still ongoing?

C: Yeah, I've done it. It's not out yet, but everything is done, the artwork is done, I'm writing the copy for the booklet on my smartphone as we're driving. It's a heavy year for Blackmore's Night this year. Not only do we have the album out, we're touring and I've got this… I call it a lullaby album, but really it was inspired by songs for my children. We have friends who had children around the same time as we did and they'd say "Oh, if I had a voice like yours I'd sing to them every night, but I don't sound like you." But it doesn't matter what you sound like, children connect with you. They don't care if it's good, bad, out of tune, whatever, they just want to connect with you. So I was inspired to put some relaxing melodies down to help children to sleep. I sing to my children every night. We played some of the songs to our friends and we found they enjoyed listening to the songs with a glass of wine after a stressful day at work. It's not just for children to sleep, it's a relaxing CD for anyone. So rather than just lullabies, I've called it 'Starlight Starbright' and it's a bunch of melodic songs. Some are originals Ritchie and I wrote together. Some are covers you will be familiar with. Some are covers you will never think of as lullabies. It'll be out this year, once we've done the booklet.

Ritchie has got a documentary coming out too, his own story in his own words. Rather than just copy from magazines and have people talking about him, it's Ritchie sat down with a guy in front of a camera, talking about his beginnings, we have old, personal pictures in there, archive footage, videos, stuff from way back in the 60s to now, his whole career. We have great commentary from some of the great guitarists and stars out there too, talking about Ritchie and his influence on them and the Rock world. So there's three pretty big things coming from us this year!

That sounds fantastic! I've had the privilege of speaking to you both three times, but you don't do much in the way of interviews, Ritchie.

R: That's right, I'm basically an introverted person. I'm shy, that's why I took up the guitar, I don't like speaking. Since getting the guitar, I find now everybody wants to talk to me! If we appear on TV or radio, they always say "Oh, can you tell us…" and I'd rather not talk, I'd rather just play. Now I seem to be talking more than ever! People ask me why I played certain things on the guitar, and honestly, I have no idea. It just seemed like a good idea at the time. I'm always interested to hear what other people say about things they've written, when they say "Oh, I was thinking about…" and I think they make it up, deep down I don't think they were thinking about anything. Looking out the window, as John Lennon would say, watching the world go by. I like doing that, I spend a lot of time looking out of the window.

We had David Coverdale in FW#69 and

he told us how he'd reached out to you, wanting to bury the hatchet. There was talk of you working together again, but that didn't pan out. Were you pleased he got in touch?

R: It's always good to be friends, we're all getting older. I'd still like to know where he buried that hatchet, I've been looking for it! He's a nice guy. It's just he wanted to do something with the Deep Purple thing and I wasn't ready to do that, I was iffy about it, back and forth. We talked every now and again, threw around some ideas but I take what I'm doing now very seriously, I wasn't particularly that interested in getting together to do something Purple related. He was very nice about it and very patient because it went on for about nine months, and he eventually decided to do those songs with his own band.

Did you hear what he did?

R: No, but that's because I tend not to listen to Rock music, as cliché as that sounds. I'm so caught up in my own strange music, in this day and age I like silence too much, I like to think. When I was twenty, I was really excited by Rock N' Roll. Now, I'm not really, because I've heard so many generic bands. It got a bit repetitive, which is why I'm in my Renaissance world. I get excited when people hand me a medieval or Renaissance CD. I love to hear things like bagpipes. My musical compass has changed quite a lot.

However, I'll probably do something next June, doing all the Rainbow and Purple songs for a few nights, maybe four nights. I don't know whether it'll be a festival or what yet, but I'll pick some people to do those old songs and jam some Rock N' Roll, that I would find exciting. I won't know who the singer will be yet for a few weeks. I have a good idea who it is, but I want to try and recreate the sound… there will be a lot of Dio stuff, but he can't be the singer, obviously. That would have been something! I noticed when I wrote the list of songs I wanted to do, it was a lot of Dio stuff. There was some Deep Purple, and probably 'I Surrender' would be in there too, that kind of thing. That's still in the talking process at the moment, but yeah, looking at doing three or four festivals or shows in June. Hopefully somebody will be interested and turn up.

I don't think there's any danger of apathy!

R: Well, you never know. Death Metal is in, that's not what I play, I play Melodic Hard Rock.

The fact you stopped doing Rock music didn't bother me as I've really enjoyed what you've done since. However, I'd love to hear you play Rock again, and all those fans who maybe didn't get on board with Blackmore's Night will feel the same.

R: I think sometimes there's a danger of nostalgia, people were younger and they were maybe having a better time then so they enjoyed that music more. People have come to shows we've played and said "I had the best time at that show, do that again!" but they might have been drunk, with a new girlfriend, so everything seemed better. I find that quite often, we'll have had a bad show but people thought it was great, and vice versa. I'm digressing, but we all have nostalgia. That's why we did 'I Got You Babe'. The past is safe, the future certainly isn't. We'll see what happens, I'll know more a few weeks from now.

What prompted the idea, was it nostalgia, was it talking about those periods on your documentary?

R: Just my frame of mind at the time. Like when we did 'I Got You Babe' it was a good time had by all, everybody was young and it had good memories, you tend to forget bad memories. Music takes you back, like certain smells can take you back to when you're a child. As a child you're much more innocent, when you're older you get caught up in problems. You look back at music, even if it was bad music… I could, for instance, look back at 'Wooly Bully' and go "Oh, that's great!" because it was from when I was much younger. At the time, I hated it, it was a horrible song played every minute on the radio. But you look back and go "Oh yeah, 'Wooly Bully!'"

You're not going to tell me who the singer is when you haven't got anything confirmed - is it someone you have worked with before, or somebody new?

R: Somebody new. I like finding new singers, I like to think I've done a good job of that in the past.

Now I'm intrigued! Last time we spoke, you told me a story you'd never shared before, which was you were preparing to play some Rainbow shows and two members of the band held you up for ransom, saying they wouldn't play unless they got more money. You drew up contracts to make clear what the pay was and asked for them back within twenty four hours. Two guys signed the contracts, the two who wanted more money didn't. So you cut your losses, and did Blackmore's Night instead.

R: That's right.

If it had been an ideal world, would you have run the two bands, and flitted between Rock and Renaissance, or would you have had to have concentrate on one at a time?

R: Deep down, I was getting bored and becoming sterile doing the Hard Rock, so when those two members decided to play that game, that actually was quite convenient. It gave me a chance to do something else and it all worked out really. Had they committed to the tour, and we'd gone out for another three or four months, I still think that would have been it. I was getting stale and bored just coming up with heavy riffs. I needed to get away from it. Before I told you about what happened, people had never heard that side of the story. Sometimes I hold back on stuff like that, but other times I feel like I am getting pointed at for doing something wrong, so I'll say what really happened.

You told me which who it was, and Candice groaned, so because Fireworks isn't into mud slinging, I omitted the names and simply wrote "two members". When the article came out, two members took to the internet to say that what you told me wasn't true and you pulled the plug simply to start Blackmore's Night. It was the same two members whose names I omitted.

R: Yep. We had agents breathing down our necks, asking for us to commit to shows, I didn't want to if things like that were going to be pulled on me at the last minute, so I had to have contracts made up. The contract offered a price I thought was fair and they basically walked away. They then called me up later asking when we were going on the road! I told them we weren't.

Talking of farewell tours, I recently watched Rainbow in Japan 1984, playing stuff from all eras, and you didn't seem to have an array of effects pedals like most guitarists have. You seemed to rely mostly on rapid changes on your tone knobs.

R: That's right. I don't have any effects pedals. When I switch, it's a way of taking a pause. I do it in the studio too, I switch from the bass pickup to the treble pickup, quickly, to get an effect. I might do two notes on the bass pickup, switch, another couple of notes on the treble and back to the bass pickup. It's a way of pausing. I sometimes use the tremolo arm and this is the same type of thing. Rather than play just a bunch of arpeggios, you can take a pause on certain notes, and I do that flicking the switch over and back, almost like a nervous thing. It gives a sonic effect, switching from pickup to pickup. I don't like the sound of the middle pickup, so I usually take those out. I don't like the thin sound it has. Flicking from the bass to the treble pickups is like using a basic wah-wah peddle.

Was that influenced by anyone, or something you adapted?

R: As usual, I just adapted it myself. I've not seen anybody else do it. Even if I had, I wouldn't be able to copy it, so I'd be back to square one. I must use the wrong side of my brain or something! Even when we appear on TV or on radio stations, and they ask us to say thanks, I can never remember the name of the show or the number of the station, Candy has to do all that. I just say my name… which sometimes I get right!

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NEW RELEASES

STALA & So - STALA & So
ESM280 - Out 21st August 2015

Founded in 1997, Stala & So. is known for melodic rock tunes and a positive attitude. The 70's and 80's glam rock bands, such as Sweet, T-Rex and Ziggy Stardust -era David Bowie, have had a strong influence on the band's image. Stala & So. is making music professionally and also having fun with it. In the beginning of 2011 the band became familiar to the Finnish tv-viewing public by taking part in the Finnish Eurovision Song Contest. They made their way to the national finals. Their new CD for 2015 is simply self-titled and it extends their music to another level, this new album recorded more towards the melodic side of hard rock with bigger hooks and massive choruses are remained etched in your mind after just one play.

LIONCAGE - DONE AT LAST
ESM278 - Out 19th June 2015

Lioncage are a new band from Germany who all met at a festival in Loreley that was headlined by Toto and Whitesnake. As all three band members are influenced by 80's rock such as Toto, Foreigner and Journey then it was an easy decision to form a band themselves. They had all played in cover bands previously and so the playing came naturally. The three set about writing their own material and the result sounds great. What we have here is polished guitar driven melodic rock and keyboard drenched ballads that we all love. If you love that eighties sound then this is an album for you, the overall sound could be described as great solid melodic rock. Lioncage already have a good following which is only going to grow when this new release hits the streets.... Watch this space.

EDGE OF THE BLADE - THE GHOSTS OF HUMANS
ESM279 - Out 24th July 2015

Edge of the Blade is an exciting new band that features Alan Kelly (Shy), John Francis (After Hours) and very talented Guitarist, Keyboardist, Producer and studio Engineer Andrew Chick with his razor sharp production. They have managed to create a really professional sounding new band and their debut album "The Ghosts of Humans" is poised to set pulses racing. The band have a wide ranging influence and the music sweeps from hard hitting melodic rock to majestic melodic metal with plenty of clout. With doffs of the hat to nu melodic metal rock similar to bands such as Alter Bridge and Avenged Seven Fold with great melodies! Edge Of The Blade have given us some refreshing slants on the rock sound.

COMING SOON ON ESCAPE MUSIC

OZONE - SELF DEFENCE
ESM281 - Out 25th September 2015

Chris Ousey and Steve Overland

Mike Slamer - Tommy Denander - Ronnie Platt - Billy Greer
Billy Trudel - Kerry Denton - Christian Wolff - Erik Sabo

The two "O's" have joined forces on a collaboration that has been whispered for years now and the rumours have all been true as this great union is about to be unleashed on the world. We all know the work of Mike Slamer (City Boy, Streets, and Seventh Key) and his amazing production expertise, well here he outshines all of his previous work with a razor sharp explosion of talent. This is a recording that will leave you open jawed and begging for more as it ticks all the boxes and more.

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ALBUM REVIEWS

FIREWORKS GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

BLACKMORE'S NIGHT
'ALL OUR YESTERDAYS'
(Frontiers) **ROCK**
Reviewed by James Gaden

It doesn't seem eighteen years since I bought the debut Blackmore's Night album. After leaving Deep Purple and following a tour with Rainbow, guitarist Ritchie Blackmore decided he'd had enough of Rock and wanted to play Medieval and Renaissance music with his partner Candice Night. Each BN album has seen Night get better and better as a vocalist and Blackmore bring in more Stratocaster, Rainbow and DP covers and just about anything else he fancied into the mix. This is their tenth studio album and I think one of the most cohesive.

The title track opens proceedings with an up-tempo, Russian-influenced feel, before a pair of instrumentals take center stage. 'Allan Yn N Fan' is a wonderful upbeat piece, juxtaposed with 'Darker Shade Of Black', a more brooding effort where the Stratocaster steps forward. Then there is the first of three covers, Linda Ronstadt's 'Long Long Time', sung superbly by Night, backed only by a very sparse arrangement. A terrific version of Mike Oldfield's 'Moonlight Shadow' fits the band like a glove, leading the listener into the less likely, but no less effective, version of 'I Got You Babe'. Night sings it alone, not as a duet, giving the lyrics a different perspective and helps to breathe new life into a classic.

The album also sees the band cover themselves, as they dust off 'Where Are We Going From Here' from their 2003 album 'Ghost Of A Rose'. The new version is more Rock driven, with electric guitar and a synth line giving the song fresh energy. There are plenty of other great moments too, such as Blackmore's acoustic foray 'Queen's Lament' or the cheerful 'Will O' The Wisp'.

With this perfect blend of Renaissance music, instrumentals, up-tempo tracks and excellent cover versions, this is yet another excellent release and I would rate 'All Our Yesterdays' as one of the best balanced Blackmore's Night albums I have heard.

NEWMAN
'THE ELEGANCE MACHINE'
(AOR Heaven) **MELODIC ROCK**
Reviewed by Kieran Dargan

Some things are undeniably English; afternoon tea, chips wrapped in newspaper and Steve Newman. It's hard to believe but with 'The Elegance Machine', Newman have delivered their eleventh studio recording and in doing so become possibly the most productive British Melodic Hard Rock outfit still in the game. Sadly, for whatever reason, Newman lacks the "presence" of many of their contemporaries but whilst many others talk it up, these guys not only talk it but walk it!

The opening salvo of 'The Suit (Skyscraper)' and 'The Elegance Machine' elicit a "where the hell did these come from?" response. Not only do Newman continue to deliver cleverly themed songs (the former dealing with corporate greed) but it also seems that Newman have found a new level in terms of their delivery. Massive hooks backed by crunching guitar, soaring keyboards and a whole new love of the distortion pedal take this to where Newman hadn't really tread before. No, they haven't decided to go Heavy Metal, but perhaps comparably think how FM went from 'That Girl' to 'Tough It Out' over a couple of albums; not heavier, not Metal, just "ballsier".

Tracks such as the excellently written and delivered 'Halo' and 'Prayer For Apollo' see Newman delve into slightly more "Modern" territory, perhaps their jaunt last year with Vega rubbed off song-writing wise. Usually, songs written about domestic abuse tend to be your standard four minute melancholic ballad, however on 'She Walks In Silence', Newman defy the trend with a marvellous "in your face" Rock track which still manages to ram home the lyrical content message, just be sure to delve into it.

'One Good Reason' and 'Pretender Surrender' continue the extremely high quality fare on offer. 'Send Us Salvation' misleads us by suggesting it's a gentle ballad before the band open up and turn it into a modern day monster. If I had any quibble it's with the closing track; the piano-led ballad 'Scars' which, despite being a good song, ends the album on a little bit of a downer when I was looking forward to just one more adrenaline-fuelled Rocker.

All in all Newman are like a fine wine, getting better with age and each release. If this was any number of Newman's contemporaries, I'm sure people would be raving uncontrollably, extolling the virtues of yet another Scandi Melodic Rock act. But the simple fact remains, Newman are British and sadly remain largely a secret to the uninitiated, although this WILL change!

Grab a half of lager, hang the Union Jack out your window and sit in your sunroom and be proud of the fact that a guy from Bognor Regis is competing at the highest level; absolutely bloody marvellous!

OZONE
'SELF DEFENCE'
(Escape) **MELODIC ROCK**
Reviewed by Ian Johnson

With Chris Ousey (Virginia Wolf, Heartland, Snakecharmer) and Steve Overland (FM) on vocals, Mike Slamer (Seventh Key) on guitars, bass and keyboards, Tommy Denander (Radioactive) on guitars, Ronnie Platt (Kansas) & Billy Greer (Kansas, Seventh Key) on backing vocals, Kerry Denton (Mother's Finest) on drums, Erik Sabo on the Hammond B3 and the late Christian Wolff (Overland) on guitars and keyboards, Ozone has arrived. And let's face it, do you need to know anymore because those names say it all – quality!

Maybe my thoughts on this album will be superfluous this time around but for what they're worth, let me say that Ozone are as good as you think they should be. With musical performances straight out of the top drawer, songs full of gigantic and instantly memorable hooks, a production from Slamer that is just sublime and two of the best singers this country has to offer, what's not to like?

Surprisingly, and what I do like most about this album, is the fact that the two singers voices blend together so well; Ousey and Overland never see the need to try to outshine or outdo each other and are content instead to make each track the best that they can make it. Strictly speaking however, this isn't a duets album. Instead the two vocalist trade vocal lines, singing straight from their hearts and sounding at all times like they are having a real blast while doing so.

As for favourite songs, all I can say is – "oh come on that's just too hard". But for the record what about 'Tiger By The Tail', 'Let The Good Will Out', 'So Blind', 'Destiny', 'Shadow On The Sun', 'Save My Soul', 'Evolve', 'Self Defence', 'Smile Before You Lie', 'Lifetime', 'Practice What You Preach' or 'Visionary Man'. I appreciate and recognize the fact that is a list of every track on the album but each one is so good (in my honest opinion) that picking out just a few would be just wrong.

If there ever was a no brainer of a release then this really is it. Great songs, great production, great musicianship plus Ousey and Overland – just BUY!

4BITTEN – 'REWIND & ERASE' *(Leaders/Soulfood)* HARD ROCK

Greece is presently more renowned for its dire financial state and the number of bailouts it has received than for producing quality Rock and Metal acts (Firewind and Outloud! aside) and Female-Fronted 4Bitten are unlikely to change that perspective too much.

This Athens quartet began life in 2002 performing covers in their local club scene. Their debut album 'No More Sins' appeared in 2009 and they went on to tour with the likes of UFO, Tygers Of Pan Tang, Blaze Bayley and the Michael Schenker Group. Sophomore release 'Delirium' arrived in 2012 and that three-year album release cycle continues with 'Rewind & Erase'.

An internet search of the band's history also revealed that both previous (well received I might add) albums had their fair share of diversity throughout, something that I feel 'Rewind...' lacks, as throughout the eleven tracks on offer the tempo remains pretty consistent. A variety of pace certainly wouldn't have gone amiss, especially as that pace tends to be of the plodding, grinding variety. 4Bitten's sound on this album is of a Contemporary Metal sound infused with a Grungy undertone – somewhat like a Female-Fronted Furyon but without a guitarist as good as Chris Green. Or songs as interesting for that matter…

I have also read a number of claims about how good front-lady Fofi Roussos' vocal range is, something I just don't get – don't get me wrong, she's not bad and has a decent, gritty quality to her voice, but she certainly ain't no Lzzy Hale. That said, the fact her vocals are buried deep in the mix certainly doesn't help her cause. The same can be said about George M's guitar parts; the riffs are dominant, along with the pounding rhythm section, but his solo parts would benefit from being more pronounced.

The likes of opener 'Die In Vain', the single 'Save My Soul' and the bouncy 'Cause I Can' are all good tunes, but over the course of the album the repetitiveness of the tempos and grinding rhythms do little to persuade me that this is an album that I will quickly feel the need to come back to. It's solid yet unspectacular.

Ant Heeks

4TH LABYRINTH – 'QUATTRO STAGIONI' *(Independent)* ROCK

'Quattro Stagioni' is the debut from four highly talented musicians from Cambridge, collectively known as 4th Labyrinth. They live in a variety of musical styles, perfectly combining their masterful talents and musical tastes to forge a unique Rock sound.

The four individuals in questions are John Harper on vocals/guitar, Marcel Kunkel on vocals/keyboards, Claudia McKenzie on bass with Tom Winch on drums. A fearsome foursome that lay down some straight-up Rock with some surprising elements buried within!

When listening to this debut, you will be taken back to one of the most prolific time in modern music, the 1970s... but not completely. Although you will certainly hear shades of Marc Bolan/T-Rex, early David Bowie and even The Kinks occasionally come to mind, 4L also have a definite 21st century attitude and sound. The combination excites and allows the possibility to create some exceptional soundscapes and the listener is served a very diverse plate of songs and musical expressions. These four are certainly developing their own identity and in the process giving us new life and energy to Rock 'n' Roll!

'Quattro Stagioni' is not only straight up Rock; the group's writing skills run deep, deep enough that they create some serious emotion-filled music. Be it slower meanderings to more mid-tempo journeys, each are a wide spectrum of musicality and vocal delivery.

The playing from these four is also very much in the brilliant category. The interplay of guitar and keyboards is ever so tasteful, and perfectly married to complicated, yet fluid bass runs, all anchored by a driving rhythmic drum sound. Their influences may come from the seventies but their music comes from the present!

4th Labyrinth have undoubtedly discovered new musical jewels on those well travelled plateaus, gems that we are meant to hear and they are meant to play!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

AERACO – 'ALL OR NOTHING' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Aeraco are a four-piece band hailing from Chicago, Illinois. The band consists of the bizarrely named Ace on guitars and vocals, Creature on bass, Spidey on guitars and Misfit on drums. Aeraco had a desire to make music the way they wanted, without the influence of a record company or even producer.

It is therefore a case of "hats off" to the guys as, with 'All Or Nothing', they have managed to create an album that blends early eighties Metal with Modern Hard Rock and in doing so have forged themselves a distinctive sound. Yes, you can hear their influences throughout but all in a very positive manner. '...Nothing' was recorded in just six days and as a result the production is a little raw and muddy at times, but that only adds to the appeal of the album.

The Modern Hard Rock of 'Into The Night' kicks off the album and immediately lets the listener know that the band intend on taking no prisoners. Next up is 'Hero' with its heavy riff and, like most of the songs on the album, is very contagious after only a few listens. The raucous 'Grimm', featuring gang vocals, is the heaviest track on the album and is foot-tapping Metal at its best; it's an offering that harks back to the halcyon days of NWOBHM.

The pace drops with the superb, but still heavy, ballad 'Running In Shadows' and this is one of the real highlights. The double-kick drum of 'Destruction' signals another Metal onslaught whilst 'LaLa' is fantastically melodic whilst remaining heavy and Ace's vocals, as throughout, are very infectious.

The six minute-plus 'Lullaby' has an Iron Maiden/Metallica intro before launching into a full-throttled, melodic attack on the senses and features blistering solos from Ace and Spidey. The album concludes with several modern sounding Hard Rock tracks starting with 'She's A Lot To Lose', 'This Life' and the acoustic-based 'Feel The Wind'; the latter being something you could imagine being a smash on MTV.

From the songs on offer on '...Nothing', it would appear that Aeraco are equally at home playing Modern Hard Rock as they are at blistering Heavy Metal. Similar to British bands Fuyron and Fahran, they have managed to write some very heavy songs whilst retaining a keen sense of melody.

'All Or Nothing' is only available as a digital download and I would recommend the FLAC files, as the album deserves to be played as loud as possible!

Mark Donnelly

ANDREAS VOCKRODT – 'ADVENTURES FROM FOGGYLAND' *(7Music)* INSTRUMENTAL

If you were a guitarist about to release an instrumental album, what do you think would be the worst time you could release it? I would suggest that that would be at the same time as somebody like, say, Steve Vai or Joe Satriani was going to release their new album. And guess what? Satriani is about to release his latest and Vai has a live album out as well. And the thing about instrumental guitar albums is, you have to be bloody good to pull them off, and even then... the likes of Satriani can do tracks that don't stick in the mind.

For me, this was really a problem when I first listened to this album, as I was listening to Satriani's latest at the same time, and there was nothing on here that really grabbed my attention. Having listened to it again however, it started to get a bit better.

The opening track is '21 Is Only Half The Truth' (keeping up the tradition of guitarists coming up with barmy song (and album) titles) and it's a strong, medium-tempo opener, while 'Greetings From Mr Knowitall' is a little too repetitive for my liking. And this is the problem. When you're competing against someone like Satriani, you've got to really be on the ball to come up with something that grabs you round the throat and doesn't let go. That doesn't really happen here and while 'March Of The Spider' is a foot tapper, it wasn't still playing in my head like Satriani's was.

There is also a bit of self-indulgence in here, with 'Riffology', 'Sergeant Tapper's Amazing Box Of Lullabies' and 'Tappology,' which are a little tedious, but then it wouldn't be a guitar album without some of that would it? 'The Foggy Waltz' is a nice, gentle, melodic tune but the album is slightly let down by the final track, 'Transition To Reality', which is basically the same backing track played over and over again; a bit strange.

So I think this is an okay album, but not outstanding, and there is quite a bit of work to be done before Andreas Vockrodt catches up with the leaders of the pack.

Andy Brailsford

ANURYZM – 'ALL IS NOT FOR ALL' *(MMR)* PROGRESSIVE

Lebanon's Anuryzm have a convoluted history. Starting out life in 2003 as a group of college friends who just wanted to make music together, the band continued to grow as a unit, until trouble hit when founder member/guitarist John Bakhos decided to leave and moved abroad. Although the band did continue for a while, when their rhythm guitarist Bernard sadly passed away in 2005 they decided to call it quits.

Bakhos (now living in Canada and who had continued to write and perform music) eventually decided that he wanted to make another go of it and moved back to his boyhood home of Abu Dhabi. There he immediately set about forming a new band, contacting old school/band-mates for help. Bakhos then set about re-invigorating Anuryzm and its music and this new album 'All Is Not For All' is the third since the band reformed.

The music that can be found on this release has a dark and shadowy edge, one that mixes musical textures not a million miles away from Opeth and mid-era Anathema (when they were still a bit angry). Yet for all the darkness that can be found on songs like 'Depolarized', 'Mineral', the beautiful instrumental 'Oceans Apart', the barnstorming 'Impermanence' and the dream-like 'Perispirit', it is the melodies that Anuryzm utilize throughout this album that bring a bright illuminating light to those dark corners of their music and in turn makes what they are doing so interesting.

And as you listen to this album you'll find yourself deeply engrossed in the dramatic world that Anuryzm have created on '...All'. The production is also a major factor in the

AMORPHIS – 'UNDER THE RED CLOUD' *(Nuclear Blast)* PROGRESSIVE

Purveyors of fine Finnish melancholic, dark Rock and Metal since 1990, Amorphis is one band who may have passed you by despite being in the game long enough to recently be celebrating the twentieth anniversary of their break-though album, 'Tales From The Thousand Lakes'. If they haven't broken through onto your radar, then maybe there's a chance they will with their twelfth studio album 'Under The Red Cloud' – what they describe as a heavy yet melodic statement – which they've recorded over a couple of months during their frantic touring schedule.

Produced (mixed and mastered) by Jens Bogren, the album sees the sextet (featuring new vocalist Tomi Joutsen) pulling in guest appearances from the likes of Martin Lopez (ex-Opeth) on percussion and flautist Chrigel Glanzmann (Eluveitie) with Aleah Standbridge adding guest vocals on three tracks. With the album's lyrics written by the "ghost member" of the band – Pekka Kainulainen – it seems like they're not afraid to work beyond their own means, adding whatever is necessary to embellish their ambition.

Encased in a package whose extravagant art (produced by Jean-Emmanuel "Valnoir" Simoulin) reflects the musical contents, its melodic and Eastern influences crop up all over the record right from the opening title track, sneaking in unexpectedly smoothly before the sense of expectation boils over and the drums kick in to introduce the songs theme big style. Prepare for quite a ride as you're taken off on a journey led by the pair of guitars with the keyboards providing the depth and texture rather than unnecessary twiddling and soloing.

On the one hand Amorphis produce songs like 'The Skull' which opens in a fury of darkness, taking a breath for some respite before another battering emerges, yet 'Tree Of Ages' takes off in a different direction with an almost Folky feel about it – think Blackmore's Night with attitude – as the harshness of the vocal contrasts with the jigging pace of the track.

'Death Of A King', selected as the single, combines all the elements of what Amorphis offer in a nutshell and goes to emphasise something that seems to be underplayed, which is the appealingly melodic nature of the songs. It epitomises the fact that what most bands need are damn good songs! Saving the best until last, 'White Night' is a belter and you can sense from the moody opening that something ambitiously epic is about to evolve.

Overall, the mix of clean and rough-edged vocals works well as the harshness doesn't grate, while the material is laden with melodic hooks and a healthy slab of heaviness without getting too extreme.

The biggest question remains – why on earth aren't Amorphis a household name and why haven't more people haven't discovered them?

Mike Ainscoe

overall style of this album, its subtlety and warmth balances everything perfectly so that nothing is wasted. The further you delve into Anuryzm's music the more you'll find a band who understand that you can be both heavy and "dark", but at the same time you must never lose sight of the fact that this type of music equally needs strong melodies, musicianship and songs to carry it off.

I have played this album many times now and I can say that it is a grower, one that gets better with subsequent repeat plays. 'All Is Not For All' only gives up its best when you really give it the time and the patience that it truly needs to work its mysteries on you.

Ian Johnson

ARCHER – 'CULLING THE WEAK' *(Metalville)* HARD ROCK

'Culling the Weak' is the debut album from Santa Cruz-based power trio Archer. Production by Mike Clink (known for working with bands like Guns 'N' Roses and Mötley Crüe) promises much and the album has pedigree, there's no doubt.

Archer cites influences such as Black Sabbath and Black Label Society and this comes through in the heavyweight power-chord laden fare on offer. They have managed to produce something which resembles old-school Doom Metal and yet not at all ripped off. The album also brings to mind Black Stone Cherry because of the deep, rich throaty vocals of front-man Dylan Rose. It is partly the richness of his tones which broadens this release's appeal, but the fine songs back that up and also show off his talent, while the guitar work takes a nod or two from Iron Maiden at times; once again without compromising any originality.

It feels really good to hear music like this still being made, sounding so full of heritage and yet so fresh. Interestingly, the album will be released first in Europe and then the U.S.A. a month or so later. Certainly the roots of this record are in England and so comparisons could be made with Metallica who took the influences from such acts as Diamond Head and made them their own with a damn fine "American music with mass appeal" twist, and that is what is happening with Archer.

One of the finest tracks on offer is opener 'Belief'. For material so heavy, these songs are full of hooks that sink right in. For a young band, there is impressive maturity in the tracks, with prominent others being 'King For A Day' and 'My Atrocity'. It's the quality of the songs that open this album up to appreciation by all fans of traditional English Metal and it could possibly hold its own alongside the first Sabbath album, such is the likely breadth of its appeal. In fact arguably the vocals are finer (although Ozzy Osbourne remains unique and unparalleled).

These kids didn't get there first and no one can ever take that away from bands like Sabbath, but when new bands come up with material like this, no one can say "Rock (or Metal) is dead". If the passion for music is there, then it's still possible to come up with material that is totally Classic and yet avoids sounding precisely like any particular artist or song. We only have to look at the success of bands like Maiden to see the potential market for high quality, effortlessly fine Metal, just like it's supposed to be. This is up there with Maiden's (and Sabbath's) debut; if they keep this up these guys could go far.

Dawn Osborne

ARGOS – 'A SEASONAL AFFAIR' *(Progressive Promotion)* PROGRESSIVE

Argos is a Prog band that have somehow passed me by; this being their fourth album since the eponymous debut in 2009. The band originally started out as a solo project for multi-instrumentalist Thomas Klarmann when he rediscovered his passion for, and returned to, the Prog genre. He'd previously been away in the Jazz world for a period of time. The project subsequently developed into a trio with erstwhile band-mate Robert Gozon (keyboards & lead vocals) getting involved along with drummer Ulf Jacobs. Later on they expanded to a four-piece with the addition of guitarist Rico Florczak.

If one were to try and find a genre into which to place Argos the closest would be the Canterbury scene (Caravan, Hatfield & The North etc.) with certain hints towards early Genesis, a bit of early Camel and the occasional nod towards Fish.

Initially I was somewhat underwhelmed by this album, but it's a "grower" as with repeated plays more of its charms are revealed; notably the instrumental passages. If there is one aspect of the album that, for me, doesn't quite hit the mark it has to be the vocal delivery which tends to be somewhat expressionless and one dimensional. What kept coming to my mind as I listened to the album was how much the vocal style reminded me of Kraftwerk and I can't help but think a more dynamic vocalist would be beneficial.

Opening number, 'Vanishing' immediately made me think that this is what Kraftwerk would have sounded like had they been a traditional Rock band rather than a synthesiser-based combo. The guitar solo is nicely varied and extremely agreeable; in fact the guitar work throughout the album is of top quality, always tuneful and never overly flashy.

'Divergence' is more in the Hard Rock vein with the chorus putting me in mind of The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown. 'Silent Corner' opens with a subtle flute refrain before the band kicks in with a delightful melody underpinned by acoustic guitar. Multi-layered vocals give added depth and whilst I'm not a fan of the saxophone, here it stays the right side of melodic and thankfully doesn't stray into tuneless screeching territory.

Both 'Silver & Gold' and 'Lifeboats' have that Fish element to their structure while the album's centrepiece is the four-part, twelve minute epic 'Not In This Picture', which is probably the Proggiest thing on offer as it moves through various phases and styles. There's some rather nice Camel-esque Hammond Organ and more delicious guitar work.

The title track features some delightful flute but I'm not sure re-working two old tracks was wise; 'Black Cat' is particularly drab.

Gary Marshall

AWAKEN THE EMPIRE – 'AURORA' *(Century Media)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Despite the canon of Rock music that has come to define their home city of Seattle, Awaken The Empire seems to take the bulk of their inspiration from the "City Of Angels" (i.e. Los Angeles) by combining flavors of Tool, Coheed & Cambria, early Hoobastank and even Rage Against The Machine to create their own blend of Alternative Rock.

Up until the present, they have released material exclusively in the digital domain ('Know Your Place' and 'Rise And Fall'). Therefore, 'Aurora' stands to be the band's first long player to get pressed onto CD and enter the traditional distribution channels. It is wonderful to hear the fruits of their labor as it is clear Awaken The Empire have done their proverbial homework.

'Aurora' exudes confidence in all three facets; songs, production and musicianship. Although they shy away from wild and excessive stringdom (aka guitar solos), this approach works well by presenting the songs in a more compact manner. They deliver an album that is as robust as it is consistent, featuring an impressive fourteen song track-list.

Many of their songs possess a strong Pop music sensibility which is none better represented than on 'Cross My Heart' whilst they also utilize elements of Electronica on 'We Control The Lights'. 'Messy' is another clear standout, as it fully realises the band's ability to compose both a memorable chorus and perform with the dynamic flair reminiscent of many Alternative Rock bands from the early 1990s. Just before you dismiss them as another facsimile of Alternative Hard Rock, they can also bring the fury which is found on 'Rise + Fall'.

This well-executed album fires on all cylinders and features an outstanding track sequence. If you enjoy modern and heavy Alternative Rock with a twist, 'Aurora' is worthy of adding to your collection.

Brent Rusche

BACKYARD BABIES – 'FOUR BY FOUR' *(Gain)* HARD ROCK

Backyard Babies are back, this time with their seventh studio album, 'Four By Four'. The Swedish four-piece have been around since 1987 with a five-year hiatus beginning in 2009. Now they've returned with even more energy and hooks than before and an album that rattles with their unique, almost street style of Rock.

The single 'Th1rt3en Or Nothing' is quick-firing with a Sleazy riff that just screams "gung-ho Rock 'n' Roll". It's a corker of a single and what stands out immediately is how tight the band are, how casual but hard-hitting their Punky style is and generally how easily enjoyable the track is. And who doesn't love a good cow bell?

'I'm On My Way To Save Your Rock 'N' Roll' is brighter but firing on all cylinders from Dregen on guitar to drummer Peder Carlsson. 'White Light District' is a little more paired back but still with a heavier chorus. The Sleaze element of BB' style is emphasized; it's Hard Rock without sounding too thick or overusing distortion. Vocalist Nicke Borg brings a great sardonic style to everything he sings, especially on the slower 'Bloody Tears'. With moving lyrics that are delivered almost deadpan, it's a wonderful union of ballad and balls.

The band has achieved enormous variety on this album. 'Never Finish Anything' offers chatty vocals with shouted backing vocals and a smooth chorus to counteract the staccato verse; it's fun, upbeat and infectious. There's a charm to the raw and rough quality of the album, it doesn't sound over-produced or even over-practiced but just on the cusp of being ready. It also retains the strong charisma BB bring to their live gigs.

'Mirrors (Shall Be Broken)' is just another example of how the band can change pace and mood effortlessly, though it sometimes sounds like they're itching to speed up. Dregen's solos are, as always, kept wonderfully jagged and unpredictable. 'Wasted Years' contains some of the shortest flashes of brilliance on the whole album with wonderful little licks where the melody is just hair-raising. All, of course, delivered with blistering pace. Dregen's solo here is a (particularly) fantastic display of his signature tone.

'Walls' was an interesting closer. Bassist Johan Blomquist leads the way in a dark, Bluesy and groovy track decorated with tight flourishes from Dregen. The final end is Alice Cooper-esque and perhaps a little dragged out when the band excel at dramatic and no-frills endings.

I agree with the band that this is their "strongest material to date". They exude cool, attitude and an effortless blend of unpolished Punk and Sleaze. Short, sweet and succinct, Backyard Babies have done it again and this time, they're hitting it out of the yard.

Sophie Brownlee

BLACK TRIP – 'SHADOWLINE' *(Steamhammer/SPV)* HARD ROCK

'Goin' Under', the debut album from Black Trip, certainly turned a few heads upon its worldwide release only last year. Who would have knew that combining members of Metal band Enforcer and veterans of the Swedish Black and Death Metal scene would result in a band that would venture out on an authentic trip down memory lane to the golden era of the NWOBHM?

The quintet from the stunning archipelago of Stockholm (the word "city" simply doesn't do the place justice!) have wasted no time in following up their debut with the excellent 'Shadowline', which picks up exactly where its predecessor left off.

Once again leaning heavily towards the hybrid of Paul Di'Anno era Iron Maiden and classic Thin Lizzy, with the occasional smattering of UFO, Scorpions, Blue Öyster Cult and Diamond Head, 'Shadowline' also injects an infrequent seventies Glam Rock feel into some of the melodies and riffs; the latter influence serving up a couple of numbers which wouldn't have sounded out of place on Def Leppard's debut effort all those years ago.

But though there are obvious references to many of the classic bands of the era, Black Trip deliver their style in such a way that it doesn't sound derivative, coming across more like an all-encompassing tribute to the scene rather than a pastiche and managing to create a sound all of their own along the way.

The authenticity of the era is enhanced by the Martin Birch-sounding production technique employed by Nicke Andersson – the twin-guitar leads and fiery solos, earthy drum sound and slightly echoy vocals the obvious examples – simply adding to the enjoyment of what is already a highly recommended album.

Ant Heeks

BLACKLIST UNION – 'BACK TO MOMO' *(Blu)* HARD ROCK

Although this is their fourth release, this was the first time I had heard anything by Blacklist Union. Hailing from Los Angeles, Tony West and company are dedicated to keeping Hard Rock alive and 'Back To Momo' is indeed a hard hitting, Rocking affair – as is the group themselves.

Now, to be honest there isn't much info out there on BU, other than they were formed in 2004 by West – who is the group's front-man – along with Todd Youth and that it seems

they have been a four-piece since then. Fiercely independent, the group have forged ahead with three previous releases ('After The Mourning' in 2006, 'Breaking Bread With The Devil' in 2008 and most recently 'Til Death Us Do Part' in 2012) and now we are set and able to enjoy their fourth!

BU are aptly classified as "Street Rockers" and no doubt a leader within the current L.A. music scene. Main song-writer West writes about life – all aspects of life from the sublime to the hardened street existence. The music fits perfectly with the emotions and subject matter of the lyrics creating a forceful wall of sound that this four-piece performs time after time.

Both the group themselves and '...Momo' specifically are vibrant and there is not a dull track on this release! Each selection will conjure up sonic atmospheres heard from the 1970's Hard Rock period to a little 1990's Grunge and Nu-Metal just for the icing! Even with all these elements, theirs is their own sound – all melted together to give us a fresh take on what we know as Hard Rock.

The energy packed into '...Momo' is equalled by the band's blistering performances of each offering; tight as one can get, Blacklist Union takes no prisoners, yet creates a sonic brilliance that one wouldn't expect from such a group!

Currently the band have aligned themselves with a very capable management/promotion company and are spreading their musical wings over international territories, pushing this brand of Hard Rock to every corner of the globe. So, don't wait to catch them live, go out and pick up 'Back To Momo' – you will not be disappointed!

A hefty slice of unadulterated Hard Rock bristling with controlled aggression; it is undoubtedly what you will see and hear when you do catch them live as well!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

BLIZZARD HUNTER – 'HEAVY METAL TO THE VEIN' *(Pure Underground)* HEAVY METAL

Well here's a title that says it all, and no one can say they weren't warned about the content of this, the debut album from Peruvian four-piece Blizzard Hunter. The rather odd moniker comes from their original name Blizzard, which obviously wasn't quite "Metal enough" and the word Hunter was bolted on (with stonking great metal bolts, natch.)

So yes... BH are a Metal band, but there are so many different types of Metal and I was part dreading pressing play as many of these types are shit. It was therefore quite a relief when after the slow intro to 'Conqueror Of Destiny' (oh yes, we have over dramatic song titles by the bucket-load here) the band stepped on the gas pedal and whisked me back to the early eighties when Metal was Metal and men were hairy.

BH mix up early Iron Maiden, Helloween and even Queensryche to great effect, chucking out fast and melodic songs with some excellent vocal gymnastics from Sebastian Palma, who has a very Bruce Dickinson-like scream that is used to great effect. There's two guitarists as well, but it's not clear if they both play lead or only one; suffice to say whoever does it really lays down some cracking solos, with some done in a twin fashion that never gets old (for me, anyway).

The thing with retro Metal is it can often be quite dull, but Blizzard Hunter definitely have that elusive spark that makes 'Heavy Metal To The Vein' an absolute joy to listen to for any old-school Metal fan. Much like Striker from issue #65, this is music that is timeless when done with passion and talent and there's certainly no shortage of either here.

Alan Holloway

BLURRED VISION – 'ORGANIZED INSANITY' *(Cherry Red/Open Eyes)* PROGRESSIVE

Blurred Vision is a three-piece Progressive/Psychedelic/Pop Rock outfit comprised of guitarist & vocalist Sepp Osley, bassist Sohl Osley and drummer Ben Riley, oddly put forward as a Canadian band even though the Osley brothers are from Persia (remember this, it's relevant later). There are several young bands utilising the Psychedelia of the seventies but it is much harder to tap into the Prog vein, BV manage it with panache.

Opener 'No More War' is a Funky foot tapper that shows its influences well, 'Rollin' On' invokes the spirit of joss sticks, Mucha posters and batik wall hangings so well does it hit the Prog vibe. 'Tonight' is a more traditional "crescendo reaching" ballad notable for the rather fine runs from Riley. 'Long May You Run' could be from the cutting room floor of the 'Dark Side Of The Moon' studio. 'Promise' changes tempo and style to a more 1980's feel. Make no mistake this is a pub sized band that make a stadium sized noise, if you find them in your local they are going to blow you away.

'Dear John' twists back to the 1960s; it's a light airy song, sweet in its simplicity. 'Arms Of Our World' is soft and lilting and Sepp Osley's guitar solo entwines its way round your mind like oil in a lava lamp. We revisit the late 1960s with 'All I Wanted', made authentic with some gorgeous Theremin. 'Wherever You Are' is another with a 1980's influence, it motors along with soaring choruses and an open road ahead of it.

Now, I told you to remember the Osley brothers are from Persia didn't I? You need to know this as it explains my favourite track on the album 'The Keeper'. The Middle Eastern influence runs through the heart of the song, this is the sun setting on a Bazaar, redolent of spices and the scent of coffee. For me this song is a little more Rush than Pink Floyd, it is an epic and will surely become a staple of their live set. They finish up with title track 'Organized Insanity' where the album goes out with a Floydian bang.

Blurred Vision have a lot of influences but somehow they have brought them up to date and given it a 21st Century twist. It's a great debut album and if Floyd, Yes and Rush are your kinda thing you'll love this. Personally I'd like to see more of the Persian influence as I think that's their true voice and what will set them apart. Seriously, track them down so you can tell your kids you were there at the beginning.

Helen Bradley Owers

BOBAFLEX – 'ANYTHING THAT MOVES' *(Eternal Sounds)* HEAVY METAL

Start, stop, start, stop. That's Bobaflex right there – especially in the U.K. In fact, here in Ol' Blighty we didn't get a first official blast of the Boba until 2013 when the excellent 'Hell In My Heart' landed on these shores some two years after its official release in the U.S.A. The fact that 'Charlotte's Web' landed that same year confused matters further and yet for a band beset by bankrupt labels and legal proceedings, that their third release in four years (and seventh in sixteen) is here at all is testament to this band's determination. It's also testament to the fact that this West Virginia five-piece are a seriously hot proposition.

Hard-hitting Rock of the Southern variety is mixed with Arena-like bombast, aggressive riffs that are desperate to be shoved in your face and an ability to have you singing for all you're worth as you dance in the aisles. That's one mean assed cocktail! Stick this lot on a tour with anyone from Five Finger Death Punch to Blackberry Smoke, Metallica to FM and they'd have the assembled throng eating out of their hands, so diversely attractive are the sixteen songs that make up 'Anything That Moves'.

The brothers McCoy – that's Shaun on guitar and Marty on errr... the other guitar – also share vocal duties, spitting snarling and harmonising to stunning effect; scaring children one minute, charming grandma the next, all the while building a twin guitar partnership to rival the best. However this is no Iron Maiden worship or Judas Priest homage; instead Bobaflex sling their guitars low and set course for the groove. Huge choruses don't hurt either and this lot have them in abundance.

'Objectified' discovers what Lynyrd Skynyrd meets Rob Zombie would sound like ("Hell Yeaaarrrghhh!"), 'Turn Me On' unearths an acoustic master-class while 'A Spider In The Dark' proves mid-paced can be miles from middle of the road. However 'Mama (Don't Take My Drugs Away)' is the unlikely sing-along your year has been holding out for.

So who are Bobaflex likely to seduce with this latest corker of an album? 'Anything That Moves', that's who!

Steven Reid

DARK HORSE FLYER – 'BREAKAWAY' *(Florida Street)* ROCK

Formed from the ashes of seventies band Breeze, South Florida sextet Dark Horse Flyer play a laid back, Blues-orientated style of Rock that embellishes a multitude of sounds and harmonies from Classic Rock and Jazz to Latin and Blues. The three guitarists in the band, Don Mularz, Scott Lane and John Tillman, waste no time in exhibiting their tremendous talents with the album opener and instrumental 'Hurricane'. Imagine if Stevie Ray Vaughn, Carlos Santana and Jeff Healey had formed a "super-group", it would have been hard pushed to sound any better than DHF.

'Seasons Fours' sees things settle down to a more gentle pace with the relaxing vocals of Mularz and the hypnotic keyboards of Bob Taylor. The band is completed by the equally talented Richard Taylor on bass and Raul Hernandez on drums and percussion; Dark Horse Flyer are musicians really at the top of their game

The title-track 'Breakaway', with backing female harmony vocals, is a smooth little number, sounding like a cross between Steely Dan & Dire Straits, whilst 'You've Got Your Reasons' has a Jeff Healey vibe and features several understated Blues guitar solos.

'Evil Woman' is one of the heaviest tracks on the album whilst 'Since You've Been Gone' is a tremendous ballad with laid-back Blues of the highest quality for the first two-thirds of the track, before taking a "left-turn" into Dave Brubeck style Jazz courtesy of some phenomenal ivory-tinkling from Taylor which then reverts back to relaxed Blues.

'You've Got A Hold On Me' and 'No Good' with their Latin Blues feel and Hammond Organ would sit nicely on any Santana album. The latter track concludes the album and the solid rhythm section of Taylor and Hernandez get to shine. The haunting piano in the beautiful ballad 'Better Days' (which is sandwiched in between the latter two tracks) brings forth memories of seventies California and is reminiscent of the wonderful band Venice.

Produced by Lane and Mularz and mastered by the legendary Bernie Grundman (Steely Dan's 'Aja' and Michael Jackson's 'Thriller') 'Breakaway' is one cool sounding album.

You will go a long way to hear a better sounding album than 'Breakaway'; simply a beautiful album.

Mark Donnelly

BOX OF SHAMANS – 'BELIEF AND ILLUSION' *(10t)* PROGRESSIVE

Back in issue #67 I could be found extolling the virtues of Heliopolis, a band likened to everything from Yes to Spock's Beard, Mars Hollow to IQ and Genesis to Transatlantic. Surely that would be enough for any musician steeped in the world of Prog? Well, apparently not, as the debut from Box Of Shamans finds three members of Heliopolis (Michael Matier (Ten Jinn), Jerry Beller (Mars Hollow) and Scott Jones (Rocket Scientists)) stretching their wings yet further.

And further in all directions, beautiful almost A Cappella vocal tracks neatly nestle alongside galloping Progressive Rock that pushes keenly at the boundaries. The short 'All For You' fits the bill on the former, the frantic, eclectic 'Optical Delusion' the latter, where a full-on smash of the accessible sing-along of Elephants Of Scotland wheels straight into Adrian Belew era King Crimson. It's all challenging, yet startlingly memorable.

'Circumstances Divide' brings us right back into song led fare, Jones' Jon Anderson meets Geddy Lee vocal whisking you along on a beautiful turn of guitar, although even here a darker bite never leaves any doubt that these Shamans won't simply provide an easy ride. A captivating jaunt it is though, melody always as important as dexterity; something the ten minute plus album defining 'The Search' confirms as its many and varied themes engage the senses.

MH, Peter Gabriel, Yes, Camel, it's all here and so much more. That hit of Prog past and present that the Yanks do so well these days in evidence throughout. 'May Daze' once more highlights the stunning vocal interplay this trio are capable of, almost as much it does the diversity, just as 'An Illusionary Ploy' veers dangerously near to pushing over the edge as the melody comes close to the sound of a band falling down the stairs; a superb solo and airy atmosphere saving the teetering trio.

Box Of Shamans aren't your average Prog act and their 'Belief And Illusion' isn't your average Prog debut… how refreshing!

Steven Reid

BUCKCHERRY – 'ROCK 'N' ROLL' *(Universal/Caroline)* HARD ROCK

'Rock 'N' Roll' will be the seventh full-length album from this American Hard Rock band since they formed in 1995. I hesitate to use the phrase "classic Buckcherry" because of their varied discography but this latest album has almost all the characteristic flavours that old

fans will love.

'Bring It On Back' kicks off with that gloriously Sleazy sound and heavy backing vocals. Josh Todd sounds in great shape, backed up by Keith Nelson's trusty edgy guitar sound and a clean, twisted solo. 'Tight Pants' is almost Jazzy with a Big Band feel. There's a tight, staccato rhythm, the kind of punchy performance Buckcherry can pull off on records and live. Buckcherry's lyrics tend to be a mix of crass innuendo, self-hatred and contempt; '...Pants' says it all in the name.

The production isn't as clear cut as the last album ('Confessions') but the dirtier sound speaks more of their earlier work so there's something for all fans really. This band have always managed to pull off ballads with a rough-around-the-edges style and lyrics that crack with feeling. 'The Feeling Never Dies' has a sense of nostalgia and hope rather than regret and Todd uses a clean voice into the higher register that works fantastically.

Nelson gets to work with a right dirty sound for 'Cradle', rippling the guitar behind the vocals. 'The Madness' is cleaner but harder and it's evidence that Buckcherry have done well with a blend of sounds on this album. They always deliver a great variety of tracks and appear confident of their own sound; even the guitar gives off a sort of snide, twisted mood.

'Rain's Falling' is another example of a classic Buckcherry ballad; not too slow and not too sad but clean and a little bit off beat and quirky. Todd's voice meanders through the melody (without wandering off) with a beaten charm to his flat-sounding voice. Nelson picks and strums, almost carelessly, in all the right places and like all good guitarists, he shows he knows when not to play.

'Sex Appeal' has the rhythm of a girl dancing; it's got pace, tightness and smokiness. The album closes with the short and snappy 'Get With It', combining a Hard Rock sound with Todd's chatty, straight-talking vocals.

It's an album packed full with pace, edge, pinches of sentiment and stacks of arrogance. Whether it'll draw in new fans I'm not convinced. There doesn't appear to be that many tracks on par with their more popular songs like 'Sorry', 'Crazy Bitch' or 'All Night Long', but it's a well-rounded album all the same.

You couldn't ask for a band with an easier attitude and more laid back version of "in your face" Sleazy Rock.

Sophie Brownlee

BULLRUN – 'BULLRUN' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Sometimes a band comes along from out of left field and totally blows my socks off, making me a little bit happier about the state of Rock and Metal in 2015, maybe bringing a tear to my jaded eye and showing that, yes, even I might actually have a soul (black though it may be). The self-titled album from Bullrun, a French threesome, is definitely NOT one of those albums. Bugger…

Take three French chaps, write some rather samey songs that belt along at breakneck speed, add a little melody and then record in a cave under the Arc de Triomphe, and Bullrun is what might come out. The songs certainly have good pace, aside from the Johnny Cash-esque closer 'There Is Nothing', but the guitar is so over-strummed it creates a wall of noise that feels like an assault to the ears.

It's a bit like The Ramones but not nearly as much fun, a fact reinforced by Rémy Gohard's often headache inducing vocals that wander in and out of tune at will. After the first listen I actually dreaded having to go back a second time, but sacrifices must be made in the name of Rock, and I am a soldier under command (of the Reviews Editor, not God).

Anyway, after a few spins it just didn't get any better, and the headache got even worse. This is just terrible, not through the competence of the musicians (which is fine), but for the song composition and poor vocals. This is amateur hour at its most amateurish, and has little or nothing that I can recommend. Au revior…

Alan Holloway

CHAINSHEART – 'LEAVING PLANET HELL' *(Pitch Black)* HARD ROCK

Cyprus is not especially famous for producing much in the way of Rock bands, and it is certainly not a country you'd immediately (and specifically) associate with Melodic Hard Rock. However, that's exactly where Chainsheart was founded four years ago. Comprised of seasoned musicians and hailed to be the Mediterranean heir of Scorpions, Whitesnake and Journey, the five-piece now return with their second album 'Leaving Planet Hell'.

During several tracks, from 'Soul Kingdom' to 'Return To The Stage' and 'Dangerous Drop', Chainsheart sound a lot like other bands from the same general geographical area – Outloud and Reload being those which come to mind first. Hence, it leaves one thinking there must be something in the water... or perhaps it's Bob Katsionis' influence all over?

However, '...Hell' is not all bombastic, catchy Melodic Hard Rock. Here and there you can find a distinct NWOBHM influence, starting from 'Breeze' – a breath of fresh air indeed – and onto the subtly Power Metal-esque 'Flames That Rise'. A real highlight is the semi-ballad 'Mystery' with its clear, sharp guitar tone, acoustic passages, subtle echoes of Greek Folklore music and Led Zeppelin-meets-Whitesnake driving riffs.

However, there's also a proverbial fly in the ointment here. One could have hardly called 'Final Destination' or the instrumental piece 'Journey' the outstanding parts of the album, even though the latter features some great lead guitar work. Also the ballad-ish final to the album, 'The Spell', is nice but somewhat uninspiring.

'Leaving Planet Hell' is neither an album of the year nor a crowning achievement for the Cypriot band – the latter certainly yet before them – but yet it is still enjoyable. While the bio promise of head-banging "non-stop upon listening to this album" were greatly exaggerated and there is nothing extraordinary about the release itself, there are more than a few solid, guitar-laden, melodic tracks on it.

On the one hand, it's doubtful if any 1980's Hard Rock antagonist would ever convert themselves into a staunch aficionado of the genre upon discovering Chainsheart's latest effort. On the other, fans of new groups who tend to look back into the musical past with their sound and melody – such as Outloud, Reload or H.e.a.t – should keep them on their radar from now on.

Alexandra Mrozowska

CHAOS MAGIC – 'CHAOS MAGIC' *(Frontiers)* POWER METAL

What do you get when a vocal force from Chile collides with an extraordinary Finnish composer and guitarist? The answer is pure magic and that is indeed what the debut of Chaos Magic is! It is the end result of a collaboration between Santiago-born Caterina Nix and former Stratovarius axe-man & composer Timo Tolkki.

Nix's vocals were featured on Tolkki's second Avalon album, 'Angels Of The Apocalypse'; certainly a break-through album and one that I had the honour of reviewing back in issue #63. Now signed to Frontiers, CM certainly shows the magic that the head of Frontiers most obviously has in hearing epic music when he suggests that certain musicians get together.

Nix is effectively launching her solo career with CM and by teaming up with Tolkki again, the pair have produced another break-through recorded work together. Steeped in classical stylings, this musical marriage displays Nix's voice in its full spectrum. The Symphonic arrangements and compositions of Tolkki totally envelop this Soprano and in turn mesmerizes the listener!

A heroic musical landscape is laid out before us through eleven musical rivers with siren-like vocals. The body of music is well suited for the magic spun by Nix's voice; at times, we will experience an almost spiritual uplifting whereas at others we hear the presence of a power house.

As we journey through this debut, we come face to face with power & strength and then whisked away on silky vocal passages that wipe away any tension that the modern world can cause. Together, Nix & Tolkki create magical movements – some which are just breathless.

However, this album is also masterful in the writing and arrangements and epic in the performances! From 'I'm Alive' on through to 'The Point Of No Return', this debut establishes Nix as a force to be reckoned with! If there is any justice, Chaos Magic will (and should) become the instrument that establishes this particular female vocalist in the higher echelons of singers and one of international stature!

Now, if only Tolkki would combine this type of work with his on-going Avalon project, than Progressive Melodic Symphonic Rock would be turned on its ear!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

DIEMONDS – 'NEVER WANNA DIE' *(Napalm)* HARD ROCK

Although bands like Loverboy and Rush have been immortalized with their inductions into America's Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, many of Canada's finest Hard Rock acts have been criminally overlooked. Bands like Harem Scarem, Coney Hatch and Anvil have all released classic albums yet have never quite received that much deserved moment in the spotlight thanks to flimsy record label support and tepid distribution.

Fortunately, those obstacles have not deterred Toronto-based group Diemonds from recording a cracking new album entitled 'Never Wanna Die.' Upon its release, this tour-de-force carries the baton established by their Canadian brethren and will undoubtedly be the envy of many. The album is bulletproof and its direct and focused presentation leaves an immediate and lasting impression.

This Female-Fronted Canadian five-piece have constructed their brand of Hard Rock from the ground up with a pithy rhythm section laying the foundation and juxtaposing it with a wonderfully elegant performance from vocalist Priya Panda. '...Die' is succinct to the point of perfection. Each track represents intensity but without ever losing its focus on listener accessibility. Their talent to pen catchy, "radio friendly" material is none better demonstrated than with tracks 'Ain't That Kind Of Girl' and 'Over It' (the album's first single).

'Never Wanna Die' showcases Diemonds combining strength upon strength and is equally as deserving of all the attention that Halestorm's recent and highly acclaimed album 'Into The Wild Life' has received. Hopefully, this album will garner the attention it absolutely deserves and provide Diemonds momentum to promote their brand of Pop-centric Hard Rock to a wider audience.

Brent Rusche

CHRIS THOMPSON – 'JUKEBOX: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION' *(Cherry Red/Esoteric)* ROCK

Well known for his work as the vocalist for Manfred Mann's Earth Band, having had three stints in the role (from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, then from 1996-1999 and a final run in 2004), Chris Thompson has had a long and varied career. He was one of the vocalists on Jeff Wayne's star-studded original album 'War Of The Worlds' and has also sung with Steve Hackett and Brian May. Not content with being a great singer, he's a skilled song-writer too, co-writing the hit 'You're The Voice' which John Farnham had huge success with, along with 'This Is The Moment', the theme tune for the 1990 Commonwealth Games.

With ten album credits with MMEB, he has also issued a string of solo albums; Starship plundered his solo material by covering 'It's Not Over' and had a hit with it. This two disc compilation attempts to provide an overview of Thompson's lengthy and impressive output.

The first thing about the compilation is that it is just like a jukebox, you don't know what is coming next. There is no attempt at chronology, as 'Darkside' from his 2014 album 'Toys & Dishes' is nestled next to the enjoyable but extremely 1980's 'Love And Loneliness' from 'The High Cost Of Living'. I will highlight the inclusion of 'One Man Mission', which might interest Fireworks readers as it was taken from Thompson's 2001 release 'Won't Lie Down'. That record was done in partnership with Mike Slamer, and is an album well worth a listen, as it it much more of a Rock effort than some of the more Pop flavoured tracks here. It's not just studio cuts here either; there's an array of live recordings woven into the mix. These include versions of tracks he cut during his time in MMEB, with 'Davy's On The Road Again', 'Spirits In The Night' 'The Mighty Quinn' and 'Don't Kill It Carol' all represented, along with a terrific studio version of 'Blinded By The Light'.

The live tracks for me are a bit hit and miss – some are great, others see Thompson's excellent voice sounding a bit ragged and are surely not the best versions available. There's a cover of Fleetwood Mac's 'Don't Stop' thrown into the mix, as well as a rendition of 'Thunderchild' from '…Worlds'. Thompson's own version of 'You're The Voice' is also included here, showing what a great singer he is – although by the time you get to it (two thirds of the way through disk two) if you didn't know that already, there's no hope for you.

It's a fine collection and while my personal preference would have been to have just used studio tracks, I can see how that might have been a problem due to the MMEB tracks being included – it's a lot easier to include Thompson's live renditions than licence the originals. Regardless, there's a great deal to enjoy here and if you're a newcomer to him, it's a great overview of the wealth of great music the man has provided us with.

James Gaden

CONSTANCIA – 'FINAL CURTAIN' *(MelodicRock)* HARD ROCK

Sweden and Melodic Rock. The two just go together so perfectly that I could just leave this review at that and recommend you go out and buy this album immediately, but should you need more persuasion then read on.

Debuting in 2009 with their Frontiers released 'Lost And Gone', the band were formed two years previously by keyboardist Mikael Rosengren (Scuderio/Token) who wanted an outlet for a bunch of songs he'd written. Guitarist Janne Stark (Overdrive, Locomotive Breath and currently Grand Design) was approached to assist with the guitars and subsequently became more involved with the process. Stark's former colleague, drummer Peter Svensson, was next on board followed by Jaded Heart bassist Michael Mueller, before the band settled on vocalist David Fremberg (Andromeda). 'Lost…' received rave reviews globally, and though work began on this sophomore release in 2013, the various other musical projects that all members are involved in has meant a lengthy delay in its release; the only line-up casualty along the way has been Mueller who was replaced by Fremberg's Andromeda band-mate Linus Abrahamsson.

'Final Curtain' picks up just where 'Lost…' left off, with their "melogressive" approach – that's Melodic and a bit Progressive, which sums up the Constancia sound perfectly as the huge melodies and choruses are underpinned by some Progressive-tinged arrangements that add some musical spice; technically brilliant but without ever losing sight of the songs. What I really like is that not every song follows the formulaic verse, chorus, repeat, solo, chorus approach, while some of the outros display a somewhat eccentric persona. Needless to say, Stark's amazing guitar work and Fremberg's soaring vocals add extra icing to what is an already impressive cake.

Opener 'Don't Tread On My Heart' features one of the album's more Progressive arrangements and the following 'Spectres' treads a similar path while also displaying a more modern, darker, almost Gothic feel. 'Way To Life', 'Live A Lie' and 'Hang Tough' head into more straight-forward Melodic Hard Rock territory with big choruses, 'Lucidia' drifts back towards the Progressiveness a little, then sitting loud and proud in the middle of the album is the sublime, eighties, FM sounding anthem 'Hold On My Heart'. 'Lies Within Lies' is a moody Rocker that reminds me a little of Treat, and final "proper" track 'Final Curtain' wraps up everything that's great about Constancia in one tidy anthem. I would also recommend getting hold of the version with the bonus tracks, the best of which, 'Greyhound Therapy', is worth the price of admission alone.

If I have one complaint, it's that the pacing is pretty similar throughout, with only the mid-tempo 'Little Fighter' being the album's slower number. However, that doesn't detract from what is a cracking album.

Ant Heeks

CUPRUM – 'BRAHMA VIŠNU ŠIVA' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Cuprum are a six-piece Czech band that first began playing together in 2004. It was not until 2007 that they decided on the name Cuprum and released a three track EP. In 2010, the first album 'Musica Deposita' was released to critical acclaim in Prog Rock circles.

It may discourage listeners to learn that the band sing in their native language, and it is certainly a loss in the lyrical department. Fortunately, the feel and mood of so much of the music contained herein is so strong that it becomes somewhat irrelevant.

'Cizi Město V Hlavani Zemi' has its roots in Jethro Tull circa 1974, with flute-runs rampant amongst the Folk Rock guitar from Jan Drchal. There is a strong Jazz theme running though 'Urnovy Háj' that brought to mind the band Traffic. As each instrument shines in its role, it becomes clear that they are very accomplished musicians indeed.

Singer Richard Malát plays a mean flute, and his interplay with Hammond Organist Štěpán Vodenka throughout most of this release is quite breathtaking. I enjoyed 'Časostroj' which came over like a European film soundtrack, full of quirky woodwind and percussion work. The instrumental 'Labe 02', despite beginning with a strange spoken radio broadcast, has some delicious guitar and Hammond Organ that is reminiscent of Dutch band Focus.

I would love Ian Anderson or Steven Wilson to collaborate with these guys, as I could imagine all parties benefitting from the experience. I am quite sure that any self-respecting Prog fan will find much to enjoy within 'Brahma Višnu Šiva' and with Cuprum in general.

Ray Paul

DAMN DICE – 'THE GREAT UNKNOWN' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

After a bit of a wobbly debut EP a few years ago, U.K. hopefuls Damn Dice seem to have taken a good look at themselves and veered off their original, rather Glammy, course onto something a lot more traditional in a Hard Rock sense. 'The Great Unknown' sees the band trading hairspray and guyliner for bigger riffs and, truth be told, better tunes.

DD have certainly retained their melodic bones, as '…Unknown' has plenty of hooks to keep the casual listener occupied. There's a definite element of Sleaze throughout, helped by vocalist Alex's high register but very cool singing. The band backing him up are tight and pretty damned heavy at times, but they never sacrifice melody for power and the whole album is never anything less than entertaining.

They even get away with a track called 'Bang Your Head', which is not the easiest thing to do. Their sound is a nice mix of American and British and I would also add to that very polished for such a young band. You could easily imagine them opening for Mötley Crüe and the like with no problems whatsoever.

'The Great Unknown' doesn't break down any barriers but it doesn't try to either. This is straightforward "kick ass" Rock with a Sleazy base, it is as heavy as you could want from this sort of music but catchy as hell as well. I would recommend that you scurry off to Youtube right now and check out their single 'Driven' – if that grabs you, and it should, then this album is a purchase you certainly won't regret.

Definitely a U.K. band to keep your eyes and ears on, Damn Dice could easily have a great future.

Alan Holloway

DAVID SINCLAIR FOUR – '4' *(Independent)* ROCK

In numerology it resounds with practicality. It's disliked in Chinese culture as it is pronounced Si, as is Death. It also is the number of the elements and there are the "Horsemen". There are also this many items for £6.99 in my local pound shop (some sales issues here I feel). Yes, four has a storied career and carries with it power and mythical provenance. It's also the number of members in David Sinclair's band, although he's been a threesome before too, swapping players like top football clubs; nevertheless, they've released three other albums and kept kicking on.

This is Blues in an assortment of flavours, some delicious rum and raisin, some plain vanilla. There is even some Pub Rock, with 'Sick Of Being Good' New Wave enough to bring Graham Parker to mind but almost lumpen enough to also remind us of Brinsley Schwartz, but Sinclair's arch lyrics and delivery raising it beyond lumpen. When they swing the Blues as on 'The Click-Clack Man', the Jazzy Tangent feel makes us want more, as does the smouldering Florian Hofer wannabe 'The Illness & The Cure' and the squelchy backing in 'Crude Emotion' (not to mention the attempt to Funk Rock the chorus)… these all need plaudits. When they old-school it though, not so successful; as on the harp-led 'World Turns Around' with a standard Blues aching solo, or when they try Reggae (please no…) on 'Down By The Canal'.

Some of this is just not exciting, special or standout enough. Sinclair's laconic drawl is fun to hear and his expressive, chatty lyrics add quality but we have heard this stuff before. Perhaps diehard fans will lap it up, but others have plenty more out there to lap at. Four in the band with four albums recorded but not at the forefront of the Blues or Rock.

Steve Swift

DAWES – 'ALL YOUR FAVOURITE BANDS' *(HUB)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

It is sometimes nice, refreshing even, to take a break from the out and out Metal and ballistic Rock music styles that assault our senses on a daily basis and just sit back and relax, letting the music soothe and caress. L.A. quartet Dawes have, in their fourth full-length album and second on their own label, managed to create a piece work that does just that.

'All Your Favourite Bands' is the follow-up to 2013's 'Stories Don't End' and sees Taylor Goldsmith (lead vocals, guitar), Griffin Goldsmith (drums), Wylie Gelber (bass) and Tay Strathairn (keyboards) in a reflective, almost ethereal state of mind. Blending Folk, Country and Americana, Dawes draw comparisons to the likes of Tom Petty, Neil Young and Bob Dylan.

With just nine songs it is certainly a case of quality over quantity and that is something that cannot be said about a lot of releases these days. Taylor Goldsmith's soulful vocals are the perfect accompaniment to the laid back musical backdrop and the Venice-like harmonies (that feature strongly throughout the album) are dripping with passion and emotion. The sound is organic and stripped back, essentially musical storytelling at its most raw. David Rawlings production is spacious and emphasises the intimate nature of the material.

'Things Happen' (the first single) and 'Somewhere Along The Way' paint optimistic mental pictures and bring to life Taylor Goldsmith's ideas and opinions. 'I Can't Think About It Now' contains an atmospheric organ arrangement and also features a sublime guitar solo. The backing vocals of Gillian Welch and the McCrary Sisters also aids in the songs ability to impress. The Gospel-tinged 'Waiting For Your Call' might have seemed too sugary at first but it actually has great appeal. The significance of the title track will not be lost on those with a knowledge of Rock music and the epic closer 'Now That It's Too Late, Maria' is basically a ten minute summary of everything that has gone before it.

'All Your Favourite Bands' may be too laid back for some, but albums like this have a timeless quality and indicate that genre definition is sometimes irrelevant.

Dave Bott

DEAD AND STONED – 'OF HARD BONES AND TRAVELLED HEARTS' *(All Is One)* HARD ROCK

'Of Hard Bones And Travelled Hearts' is an interesting and enjoyable debut album from a German three-piece who met in a pub in Upper Franconia ten years ago. It's been a long time coming then, but undoubtedly between them guitarist Kai Wagner, vocalist/bass player

DIMINO – 'OLD HABITS DIE HARD' *(Frontiers)* ROCK

Vocalist Frank Dimino first came to prominence back in 1975 as a member of Angel, alongside keyboard maestro Gregg Giuffria. Their self-titled debut and it's follow-up 'Helluva Band' portrayed a pompous, Progressive style before they began drifting in a more straight-forward AOR direction. The band dissolved in 1981, Giuffria going on to form his own self-monikered outfit before eventually finding success with House Of Lords while Dimino joined the Paul Raymond Project with the UFO guitarist and also sang on numerous Soundtrack albums. He eventually moved to Las Vegas and utilised his time as a vocal teacher as well as fronting a number of Vegas cover bands. Although occasionally touring with a revamped Angel line-up, 'Old Habits Die Hard' is his first complete recorded work in some twenty-five years.

For the recording of the album Dimino has recruited (from his Vegas band Vinyl Tattoo) guitarist Oz Fox (Stryper) who turns in an amazing performance, along with numerous other guest appearances from the likes of Eddie Ojeda (Twisted Sister), Rickey Medlocke (Lynyrd Skynyrd), Pat Thrall, Jeff Duncan (Armored Saint) and former Angel colleague Punky Meadows, with producer Paul Crook (Meatloaf, Anthrax) overseeing proceedings.

It's far from a nostalgia fest, although the keyboard laden 'The Quest' certainly harks back to the pompous Angel early days. The remainder of the album takes on a more straight-forward Classic Rock, guitar-driven approach, through the likes of opener 'Never Again', the punchy first single 'Rockin' In The City', 'The Rain's About To Fall', the frantic 'Mad As Hell', the highly commercial 'Sweet Sensation' and the old-time Rock 'n' Roller 'Tonight's The Night'. The mid-tempo 'I Can't Stop Loving You', the slow but heavy crawl of 'Tears Will Fall' and the mighty power ballad 'Even Now' take on a slightly Bluesy slant, while the beautiful ballad 'Stones By The River' introduces a Soulful, almost Gospel, characteristic to close the album in fine style.

However, the ultimate attraction to this excellent album is Dimino's voice, which has lost none of its power or clarity and sounds just as good as it did back in 1975 – the range he displays on '…Now' being the prime example. All in all, a very welcome return.

Ant Heeks

DISTRICT 97 – 'IN VAULTS' *(Lazer's Edge)* PROGRESSIVE

Progressive in every sense of the word, Chicago's Female-Fronted District 97 are not the kind of band you'd expect to find an American Idol finalist in, but nevertheless this is their third album with singer Leslie Hunt and expands on the wonderful 'Trouble With Machines' in many areas.

Imagine, if you will, a mixture of King Crimson, Spock's Beard and Liquid Tension Experiment, then add in Judie Tzuke for the vocals and you'd be roughly in the same ball park. Making a bit of a name for themselves backing up John Wetton on his last U.S. tour has also done them no harm at all (check out the 2014 live album!), and the band have continued their own career by utilising the Kickstart pledge system to record their latest, and perhaps best, album thus far.

'Snow Country' is a particularly schizophrenic opener that's part ethereal ballad and part Prog Metal opus, with superb musicianship and truly original melodies – it needs a few listens but it soon sinks in. If anything the following 'Death By A Thousand Cuts' is even more out there; drummer Jonathan Schang, guitarist Jim Tashjian, keyboardist Rob Clearfield and bassist Patrick Mulcahy create the discordant staccato riffs and ensemble runs for Hunt to soar over.

The unorthodox vocal lines and Jazzy organ solo of 'Handlebars' and the light and shade of the superb 'All's Well That Ends Well' are less heavy and maybe all the better for it, whilst the simpler structure of 'A Lottery' highlights the endearing fragility of Hunt's voice, albeit with a catchy instrumental workout in the middle.

Contemporary song-writing at its finest runs through the infectious 'On Paper' and the multi-textured 'Learn From Danny', with the wonderfully catchy Enchant-like 'Takeover' and the eleven minute 'Blinding Vision' also vying for top honours. The latter actually sounds like it's ending after a few minutes of string arrangements and plaintive vocals, only for the "closing" percussive flurry to herald another seven minutes of KC-influenced brilliance.

With a stunning production by the band with Chris Harden and mix by Spock's Beard/Transatlantic alumni Rich Mouser, District 97's music requires a bit of work on the listener's part. Hardly anything is immediate or goes where you expect it to, but if you're willing to make the effort the rewards are well worth it. 'In Vaults' is a must for adventurous listeners everywhere.

Phil Ashcroft

Andreas Niemczyk, and drummer Adrian Heckel have fashioned an album of heavy riffs and catchy tunes fit to warm the cockles of any Hard Rocking heart.

All three musicians cut their teeth, apparently, in their local Hard Rock, Punk and Metal scenes, with cited musical influences that include AC/DC, Guns 'N' Roses, Motörhead, Led Zeppelin and Bruce Springsteen. You can hear all these bands in the music at some point, but particularly in evidence are the jabbing AC/DC-inspired riffs and an occasionally gruff vocal delivery and phrasing that is reminiscent of Lemmy Kilmister at his smoothest.

The sound is full and ballsy with songs that are powerful yet melodic. Wagner's guitar work is fluid and expressive throughout, breathing life even into the album's more straightforward Rockers. At times aggressive, at times laconic, the vibe smacks of The Cult's 'Sonic Temple'. Occasionally they sound like they might be stoned but believe me, they sound anything but dead!

Personal picks include 'Devil Alive', which never fails to get the foot tapping, the more earnest, Grungy and Psychedelic 'Summertime' and 'Everything's Alright'. 'Hell Ride' and 'Fever Dog' send a clear statement of intent, while 'Won't Back Down' is notable for its Billy Duffy-esque riff and its Springsteen-influenced melody – sounds like a single to me!

'Of Hard Bones And Travelled Hearts' (it's better that way around) is the sound of a band with some serious road miles under their belts who, undeterred, are still striving for "freedom of heart and soul". It's a summer and also a road album. Hopefully it's a road that will finally take them out of Upper Franconia and into a pub or club near you.

Michael Anthony

DEAD LORD – 'HEADS HELD HIGH' *(Century Media)* ROCK

They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover and the same goes for albums; when the Reviews Ed sent me this, one look at the album art made me think "oh, here we go, a poor man's Black Sabbath". However, despite the skull being held aloft and the old-school choice of font, Dead Lord are more Thin Lizzy than foreboding Metal.

'Heads Held High' is the band's second album, following on from 2013's 'Goodbye Repentance'. Lead by guitarist/vocalist Hakim Krim, DL play unashamed seventies-influenced Classic Rock, as the repetitive opener 'Farewell' demonstrates. 'Ruins' gallops along like a watered down Iron Maiden, while 'Mindless' very much employs the Lizzy template. The band don't really do ballads, only 'The Bold Move' makes any attempt to slow the pace, and even that kicks off about half way through.

DL made every effort to capture the authentic sound and feel of the 1970s by recording everything together, live - and it has worked. The album has a vintage feel to it and a warm, powerful sound. The only point of contention for some listeners might be Krim's voice. The band classes it as "unique" – I think a better phrase would be "acquired taste".

He doesn't sound like any of the legendary 1970's singers who influenced so many, like Robert Plant, Paul Rodgers or David Coverdale. I personally thought he had a sound similar to John Wheeler (aka Hayseed Dixie's Barley Scotch, but without the twang) and Joey Sinopoli. It didn't bother me as I like both of those guys, but that "more nasally" tone may grate on some.

That possible reservation aside, DL peddles a decent, vintage-influenced sound and proudly wears their Lizzy influences on their sleeves. They aren't going to be giving Black Star Riders any sleepless nights, but they aren't bad either. Any band prepared to write their own songs and record them with an old-school method is worth checking out; Dead Lord do just that.

James Gaden

DEGREED – 'DEAD BUT NOT FORGOTTEN' *(Sun Hill)* HARD ROCK

Where do I start?! I suppose I must begin by offering huge congratulations (on behalf of every Melodic Rock/AOR enthusiast) to Degreed who, after more than a decade in such an unstable Rock environment, are still together, producing excellent musicianship and, most important of all, still learning, developing and perfecting their craft with each sonic contribution.

'Dead But Not Forgotten' is the band's third album and it follows hot on the heels (well, eighteen months) of 'We Don't Belong' (an opus that was a huge leap forward from their solid 2005 debut 'Life, Love, Loss') and one that generated innumerable plaudits far and wide. I've always been aware of their existence, ever since they clinched their inaugural record deal with MelodicRock Records, but it was only when I saw them in Bolton earlier this year that I realised this was a band with so many strings to their bow and each string could flit between, and flirt with, more sub-genres than you could shake a stick at!!

So, what are Degreed? Melodic Rock, AOR, Modern Rock, Prog, Metal...? Well, the easiest thing for me to say (and I will) is that they are all of those... and more. But don't panic, if you're not a Metal fan you will hardly notice their spasmodic Metal-tinted forays and the same applies to the Prog nuances on display. The pace of 'Dead But Not Forgotten' is fast and therefore no one particular technique hangs around long enough to be an affliction; they only compliment the songs they're deployed within. What is constant throughout, however, is melody with a capital 'M'! Robin Ericsson (vocals, bass), Daniel Johansson (guitar), Mikael Jansson (keys) and Mats Ericsson (drums) must have melody gushing through their veins, as ALL fourteen (yes, fourteen!) songs exude the stuff from every note, verse, bridge and chorus.

Opener, 'The Scam', is a monumental Melodic Rocker that comes out of the traps faster than a nun leaving a brothel! A blazing, bombastic start that is very reminiscent of fellow Swedes, The Poodles and Eclipse – instant proof that Degreed have upped their game considerably… yet again. Another comparison I feel duty-bound to make is that with our very own Vega; 'Shame On Me', 'Better Safe Than Sorry', 'Drama', 'Touch Of Paradise' and 'Firefly' are commercial sing-along's with that Modern Rock vibe and intensity (noticeable in varying degrees throughout the album). One point worth noting is that Ericsson's vocal delivery on 'Love Me, Love Me Not' is eerily evocative of the late, great Steve Lee. 'Kill Your Darlings' is another pedal-to-the-metal stand out.

Personally, I feel fourteen songs are too many but without a filler in sight, I fully appreciate their judgment. High octane plus mega melodic equals impressive!

Dave Crompton

DEVIL'S DICE – 'LIBERTARIAN' *(D-Force)* HEAVY METAL

Midlands Melodic Metallers Devil's Dice are new to the scene and 'Libertarian' is one of the strongest debuts I've ever heard. By Melodic Metal I mean in the "Classic" sense as their sound veers more towards the highly melodic version from the eighties rather than the type we would consider as Melodic Metal today. They share a lot of similarities with bands like Tygers Of Pan Tang, Judas Priest and many bands of the eighties era, only I'd say they are slightly more melodic than those comparisons may imply.

DD are centred around principal song-writer and guitarist David Clark and, alongside fellow guitarist Chris Webb, they deliver some wonderfully melodic guitar licks and infectious "air guitar inducing" Metallic riffs. Some may know vocalist Matt Gore from another Midlands Metal band The Mighty Wraith and his voice sits perfectly in the mix with Clark's compositions. Gore has a powerfully melodic voice that adds an extra layer of melodious glory with his smooth style.

The guitar work on 'Libertarian' as a whole is immense and amongst the awesome riffs are some delightful solos which add an extra edge to enjoy. These solos, whilst being quite technical, are never overly widdly so for those of us (myself included) who suffer with narcolepsy around guitar histrionics need not panic! There is some truly professional and uber-talented guitar work on display here including some spectacularly technical stuff which really begs the question why have I never heard of these guitarists before?

'Libertarian' is infectious and instantly enjoyable; it is a Classic Metal fan boys wet dream but ramp up the melodic nature of those classic bands by ten to generate a real impression of what DD are about. This album should come with a sticker stating "air guitars and head-banging are mandatory whilst listening".

The style of the album may hark to an approach popular in the past and these roots are worn like a badge of honour in the songs, but this album is not a throwback and is certainly not dated. Devil's Dice have stayed true to that style unapologetically but have managed to update that sound for an audience in the here and now to enjoy, pretty loudly, with beer and a neck brace ready.

There are many songs to enjoy and far too many exposable highlights to go into too much depth but I will highlight the album closer which is slightly different to the rest of the album. 'Matter Of Faith' sees the band deliver some pure Melodic Rock joy with its sweeping AOR-like chorus and insane guitar hook.

I can't recommend this album to Classic Metal and Melodic Hard Rock fans enough; it is spot on.

Paul Woodward

DIAMOND DOGS – 'QUITTERS AND COMPLAINERS' *(Livewire/Cargo)* HARD ROCK

Let me say from the off that this may be my album of the summer! Diamond Dogs formed back in 1992 and their tenth full-length album, 'Quitters And Complainers', makes you think of sunshine, dancing and festival camaraderie. There's also a bonus disc, 'Let's Have It – Live in Bilbao', so you can test all three of those things out.

Diamond Dogs make seamless song-writing and tight performances sound easy. 'Runaway Romeo' is an organ-smattered, Bluesy Rock 'n' Roll piece with just the right amount of interest for an opener, without giving you the best. 'Alright, Alright, Alright' is pacy but happy-go-lucky and despite the rich sound, nothing feels out of place or purposeless. 'Stop Barking Up The Wrong Tree' shines the spotlight on their organist, Duke Of Honk, but also has some fantastic crooning backing vocals. 'Broken' is the first toned down track; it's mellow, meandering and gentle, perhaps lacking in impact but certainly lovely. If there is one small knock, vocalist Sören Sulo Karlsson has a tendency to sound tight or flat, something more acute in repeats of choruses, and these moments are also exacerbated when a song feels too long.

'Back To Babylon' twinkles, crashes and screams at you and boy does it work. It exudes energy and invites dancing. The production sounds pretty rough but it adds to the outdoor "jam-night" charm of the whole album. I like the slightly thinner-sounding 'Rollercoaster'; it's

EAT THE GUN – 'HOWLINWOOD' *(Steamhammer/SPV)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Apparently this is album number five from German duo Eat The Gun, and I'm ashamed to say I'd never heard of them before. Ah well, you can't listen to everything but after sampling 'Howlinwood', I was definitely annoyed that I hadn't got into ETG earlier because they are pretty darned good.

The label that has been happily slapped on the band is "Alternative", which is usually a big red flag to me as I have heard waaaay to many albums with said label that limped along like a centipede after a crippling Dr Martens accident. It has a tendency to mean whiny, ball-less Rock by people with interesting beards, so I'm officially peeling it off of ETG because they frickin' well Rock like hell.

In fairness, ETG could be easily compared to the Foo Fighters, especially on the turbocharged and stupidly catchy second track 'Falling', which would sell a million if FF released it as a single. The band's own single 'How Does It Feel' has more of a Linkin Park vibe (although without the Rapping) and is a slow burner with a crunchy, anthemic chorus. As with many bands, ETG are at their best when giving it "some welly" and slower tracks like 'Old Friend' let the album down a bit, but then again there's always 'Take It Away' to bring the mood back up again; it's another FF-esque Rocker.

So ETG are certainly a talented duo, with plenty of crunchy, melodic and heavy tracks that could make a good bit of cash if certain other bands released them. Hell, Oasis could make a successful comeback on the back of 'Electric Life' – but I'm glad Eat The Gun have kept them all for themselves.

'Howlinwood' is a fun, eclectic and upbeat experience that has something for everyone.

Alan Holloway

a tight, compact track but one that still has a Funky feel and rhythm.

On the live disc, one noteworthy track includes the dusky 'Rush For Comfort'; the piano soothes, Karlsson rasps, the guitar cuts through like silk and you're in that Jazz bar all over again. Mats "Magic" Gunnarsson (who sadly passed away last year) blasts the saxophone in 'Autopilot' bringing a whole new spark to this already hot-burning band. The live sound is a touch more aggressive and urgent and sometimes a bit crowded. It's still full of fun however and always offers something a little different. 'Yesterday's NYMPH' smoulders to tinkling piano and Karlsson is backed by a crowd eager to join in.

It's an album for fans of The Quireboys, Hanoi Rocks and laid-back Rock 'n' Roll. There are all the bells, whistles and frills you could hope for, without any of it sounding excessive. The song-writing seems to follow a formula so there isn't the variety you might hope for, but it's all done so richly and in such a kick-back style that I just want to open another cold one and play it all over again.

Sophie Brownlee

DRIFTGLASS – 'ALL THAT REMAINS' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

'All That Remains' is the intriguing debut album from a Canadian Progressive Metal six-piece who are light on promo material and seem intent on letting their music do the talking. And when their music speaks, it speaks in tongues. Tongues of porcupines and dreams, kings and queens, of maidens clad in iron and Alice's in chains. It also speaks in shades of pink and black and crimson. A veritable Tower of Babel inhabited by men called Alvin Ihsani, Ilya Maximenko, Andrei Zaretski, Alon Shenfield, Gera Kisselman and... Jeff Marshman.

As is often the case when so many different voices attempt to speak as one, the results can sometimes be confusing. '...Remains' is clearly competent and well-intentioned. There is much here that does intrigue. There's also much that struggles a little for its sense of uniqueness and identity. Apparently Driftglass used to be called Dissident Saint – and you certainly need the patience of one to unpick some of what's here, as tracks slip from section to section, threatening to take off in inspiring fashion for pastures and countries new but rarely managing to do so.

That said, when the combination of musicians and influences does work, it really works well. 'Evelyn' is smooth and coherent and contains the album's strongest, sweetest and most powerful melody. 'Disconnected' is another that offers something a bit different with guest female vocals contributing to the track's slightly haunting and edgy feel. The impromptu burst into The Dave Brubeck Quartet's 'Take Five' during 'The Unfolding' is a delightful and entertaining surprise. Ditto the title track's string embellishments.

A particular highlight for me is the keyboard playing of Zaretski which provides drama and colour throughout, adding to the tracks without intruding and lifting them above the mundane. Check out, for example, the cinematic intro to 'My Last Lament', the solo in 'The Rise' or the moody piano intro to '...Unfolding'. There's plenty of cool guitar work too – courtesy of Maximenko and Kisselman – for those interested in John Petrucci-style virtuosity.

Driftglass is not a bad name for a band producing music that is sharp but sometimes in need of direction. 'All That Remains' is not a bad name either, and it's not a bad album. But strip away the overt influences and what does remain? Talent and a few good tracks, I'd say. A little less musical jabbering and a bit more focus... and these guys could be an interesting proposition.

Michael Anthony

EDDIE MULDER – 'DREAMCATCHER' *(Oskar)* PROGRESSIVE

Eddie Mulder has been around the music industry since the early eighties and is currently the guitarist with Dutch Progsters Leap Day and has filled the same role with both Flamborough Head and Trion.

'Dreamcatcher' is by its nature a sedate, wistful and, at times, ethereal album of instrumentals dominated by the sound of acoustic guitar, and very nice it is too, albeit (I think) I would need to be in a particularly contemplative mood to listen to it from beginning to end post this review, as there's a tendency for the tracks to merge into one another as the "feel" across the album is pretty similar. This is invariably the danger of acoustic/instrumental albums and I've even found this with one of my heroes, Steve Hackett, whose acoustic albums I never play in their entirety as I tend to want the greater variety offered by his more traditional fare.

Hackett is a good reference point for the material here with some early Camel also in the mix, not least when the flute comes into the picture which, of course, is redolent of both of these artists. Listen to 'Questions' and tell me I'm wrong. If you are as old as I am you might recall a children's U.K. TV series called 'Tales Of The Riverbank' and several times I was reminded of that show's theme tune.

The musical themes, melodies and refrains are all strong and very pleasing across the fourteen tracks on the album, the last two ('Humble Origin' and 'Wandering') being bonus tracks which are re-workings of tracks from LD and Trion respectively.

There's also a filmic quality to some of the tunes, notably 'Tenderly' which builds to an Andy Latimer style electric guitar section before keyboards take over. 'Hurry Up!' is, as its title suggests, one of the more energetic numbers on the album while the second track 'Symbiosis' features a delightful piano refrain which is underpinned by the ubiquitous acoustic guitar.

If any of the tracks appeared as part of a random selection I'd happily listen to it and certainly wouldn't be tempted to hit the 'skip' button'. This is "mood music" at its finest and well worth checking out, particularly for those mellower moments in your life.

Gary Marshall

EDEN – 'EDEN' *(Independent)* MELODIC ROCK

When I was asked to review the album of this Italian five-piece, called Eden, my first thought was "what a creative name". Literally Google spat out about fifty other bands from all around the world named 'Eden Something Something Something' but I don't want to wrong them. Italy seems to be one of these countries where AOR and Melodic Rock is still alive and these five guys with beautifully sounding names – Patrizio Izzo (vocals), Stefano Mastrangeli (guitars), Alessandro Iovannitti (drums, percussion), Paolo Castellani (keyboards) and Giordano Latini (bass) – have found their inspiration in bands like Europe, Bon Jovi, Survivor, Journey and House Of Lords. In 2011 they formed Eden and thereby put another very promising AOR band on the market.

They now release their self-titled debut. This ten track record kicks off with 'Dreamin", which already gives a very good impression of what the entire album is like; well-written, classical AOR with good lyrics, a BIG sound, very catchy melodies, magnificent guitars (yes, there ARE others apart from Richie Sambora and Tommy Denander being able to write awesome solos) and choruses that invite you to sing-along all topped off with superb production.

The songs don't differ much but each of them has a certain special thing about it. 'Fear Has Gone', 'I Know You Know', 'Enemy' and 'Into The Night' are probably the songs that give the best impression of their skills. The latter is introduced by a minute or so long intermission named 'The Call' and then starts with a bombastic sound, drums and guitars that other masters of AOR couldn't have written much better. The lyrics create, together with the fantastic instrumentation, a passion-loaded, powerful and longing atmosphere that kind of soaks the listener into the story; in short, my personal favourite.

The overall album from the song-writing and the skills of each of the musicians to the mix/production really knocked me over. Only the – in parts – too prominent voice of Izzo I personally can't really make my mind up on since it's VERY nasally but not necessarily bad in any way (the opposite!). It's something that will be purely a matter of taste and does surely give Eden less of an exchangeable sound in the world of AOR bands. I suppose with a little more reverb and a little less loudness in the mix, there wouldn't have been any reason to mention this.

However, I can't really offer any bad word about the debut of this Italian group and would recommend you to give it a listen. If you can actually manage to FIND the band (I'll give you a hint: www.facebook.com/edenrockaor) I have a suspicion you will be impressed.

Julia Braun

EDGE OF THE BLADE – 'THE GHOSTS OF HUMANS' *(Escape)* HARD ROCK

Edge Of The Blade is the brainchild of guitarist, producer and studio engineer Andrew Chick with 'The Ghosts Of Humans' being their first album. The name of the band might be a new one to our scene but the remainder of its personnel will certainly be no strangers to many of the Fireworks readers. On drums you will find Alan Kelly of Shy whilst the vocals are handled by ex-After Hours vocalist John Francis. Together, these three men have recorded a powerful, melodically heavy slice of Hard Rock that I have returned to many times since it first arrived at Johnson towers.

There is something hypnotic about the harmonies and melodies that Chick and the band have used throughout this release and they have a way of coming to mind many times during the day, which only serves to give you the urge to go and play the album once more and enjoy it again at an ear splitting volume. However don't be fooled by the inclusion of Kelly and Francis, as this isn't a pink & fluffy (copyright Derek Oliver) AOR album. Instead, the songs are full of muscular and attacking guitar riffs, over-the-top drums and a vocal roar that I didn't know Francis was capable of. These facets all combine and work together so well that they make this first EOTB record a strong contender for debut of the year.

As soon as the album begins, your ears will be immediately pinned back, as the searing guitar riff of opener 'Vital Signs' hits you square on the nose. Francis' vocals then come in and the roar that I mentioned previously becomes another facet that is evident right from start; as he sings, he hammers home the melody of the song directly into your brain.

Following such a superb start could have been hard for a new (ish) band but wait until you hear 'Believer', 'The Taken' 'The Ghosts Of Humans', the Black Sabbath riffage of 'Who's In Control' and the stupendous hook-filled 'River Runs Red' (which I personally think is one of the tracks of 2015) and you'll soon find yourself amazed that this is EOTB's debut album.

2015 is shaping up to be another fantastic year for Rock music and as long as albums come out that are as good as 'The Ghosts Of Humans', then I for one will be more than happy. Edge Of The Blade – and more precisely Chick, Kelly and Francis – should be rightly proud of this album.

Ian Johnson

ERIC CHARLES BAND – 'CAN YOU FEEL IT?' *(Independent)* MELODIC ROCK

The Eric Charles band hail from Canada and I would describe them as Pop Rock with an Indie flair. There are quite a few influences and sounds on display through out the album but there is a strong sense of American style Pop Rock along the lines of most noticeably the Gin Blossoms and occasionally elements of the Counting Crows. But these guys don't blend in

with the American bands fully because there are some really strong British Indie style quirks to their song structures and overall sound. It's noticeable but not over powering as I find the band veers more towards a polished Americanised vibe than the usual and expected discordant rawness of British Indie; Charles is without doubt heavily influenced by British music. It's also worth noting that Harem Scarem's Harry Hess has mastered the album and I feel that only heavily emphasises the smoother melodic elements in Charles' song-writing.

I really like the edge to Charles' vocals which are slightly gritty and he really puts me in mind of Mike Tramp. There were a couple of songs and I was racking my brain on who he reminded me of and it eventually it clicked that that they reminded me of some of Tramp's recent solo output. Musically there are some great melodic guitar hooks, such as 'I Never Did You Wrong' which, in particular, got under my skin yet despite there being quite an amalgam of influences (including those British Indie touches and quirks which seem to make them stand out amongst the crowd). 'Freak Out' is borderline, straight up Melodic Rock.

Another stand out track for me is the "radio-friendly" 'Do It Again' which has a strong memorable chorus and will definitely get into your head. This really highlights that when these guys are a good, they are very good with catchy melodies and enjoyable feel good tunes. Charles doesn't seem afraid to mix it up in his song-writing, even opting for a Rap section on 'You Read' which works really well (believe it or not)!

Eric Charles Band should appeal to fans of the likes of CC as there are strong Pop elements to their style and although it has those British influences, unlike British Indie in general, it sticks to having a melodic sheen which far more appeals to my own tastes.

'Can You Feel It?' is an entertaining and enjoyable album, it's not going to set the world on fire, but if you dig this brand of Indie Pop Rock it'll definitely get you dancing around your kitchen in your dressing gown on a Sunday morning with a smile on your face!

Paul Woodward

EX – 'CEMENTO ARMATO' *(Andromeda Relix/Nerocromo)* HARD ROCK

Ex is an example of veteran Hard Rock from Italy that is sung in the mother tongue. This is the fifth full-length album from the four-piece from Verona. They've been attributed the tag "Pasta Rock" but that doesn't actually mean anything musically, although their songs about drugs, junkies, violence, ignorance and fighting against a corrupt system share some of the anti-hero feel of Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns.

The songs follow a similar path of simple, slightly dark, rhythmic riffs being repeated while Roby Mancini (not the AOR singer or the football manager of the same name) sings solidly over the top with the band stepping it up a gear for choruses. He has that manly sound Italian Rock singers often adopt without going overly gravelly like Ligabue or Vasco Rossi do.

The best example is 'Weekend' that is an ode to living it up with some robust riffing and effective hooks. Many of the riffs have a Thrash-lite feel and there are gang-chants over the top at times which give the band their identifiable sound.

Songs such as 'Cane Bastardo' ('Bastard Dog'), 'Fino All'ultima Goccia Di Sangue' ('Until The Last Drop Of Blood') and 'La Sconfitta del 200' ('The Defeat Of 200') tell you this isn't the Verona that featured the 'Romeo And Juliet' balcony but tales from the darker corners.

There's a sturdy production sound and this is a good example of Italian Hard Rock that has character and avoids sounding like traditional European Metal.

Duncan Jamieson

GUS G – 'BRAND NEW REVOLUTION' *(Century Media)* HEAVY METAL

One of the most noteworthy, if not prolific, guitar talents to emerge in the last decade or so, Greek shredmeister Gus G is rapidly turning into a real force of nature. Ever since the Thessaloniki native first made waves at the tender age of eighteen, he's rarely been far from the front pages of the myriad of Rock and Metal media.

Stints with bands such as Dream Evil, Nightrage and Mystic Prophecy were a vital stepping stone in establishing his identity in the early days, but it was with his own band (the brilliant Firewind) that his standing within the industry really began to grow in stature. Inevitably, his six string talents were destined to catch the eye and it was no real surprise when everyone's favourite eccentric uncle Ozzy Osbourne gave him the chance to prove himself to a worldwide audience. Grasping the once in a lifetime opportunity with both hands he not only helped Osbourne mould his strongest album in years (2010's 'Scream'), but also worked his ass off to embed the Firewind brand with a whole new audience and launch a parallel solo career to boot.

Released just over a year ago, his 'I Am The Fire' debut took a lot of people by surprise; not least because it was a largely vocal affair which allowed GG to explore many different sounds and styles that wouldn't have been so easy to introduce elsewhere. And although barely a year has passed since its release, he already has a follow-up ('Brand New Revolution') primed and ready for take-off.

Aside from the caustic instrumental 'The Quest' which opens the album in particularly uncompromising style, like its predecessor this release is also an entirely vocal affair. Featuring contributions from such luminaries as Mats Leven, Jeff Scott Soto, Elize Ryde and Jacob Bunton, recorded under the aegis of both Jay Ruston and Mike Fraser, 'Brand New Revolution' picks up where '...Fire' left off. When a lot of guitarists "go solo" they use the opportunity to showcase their fret-board talents at the expense of everything else, not so GG. Yes, his firebrand fret-board pyrotechnics are certainly well in evidence throughout, but not at the expense of some rather good songs.

Again proffering a revolving conundrum of moods and styles – crushingly heavy one minute, coy and reflective the next – tracks like 'The Demon Inside' (with Leven), 'Gone To Stay' (with Soto) and the ethereal 'What Lies Below' (with Ryd) all display hitherto unexplored facets of our hero's psyche. Heavy on the atmospherics, characterised by multihued light and shade and deftly balancing angst with melody, Gus G once again proves why his talent is increasingly one of the most sought after in the business.

Dave Cockett

FLORIAN GREY – 'GONE' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Berlin-based Florian Grey is the former lead singer from Eaves End. He recorded two EPs and an album with the band and has played live with the likes of Tarja Turunen and Doro Pesch. After leaving EE, he worked as a guest singer for different projects and did some session work. Along with musician Bjorn Meindl, Grey has now created a dark and brooding solo album that should appeal to fans of music with a Gothic slant, similar in style I would suggest to The Mission and Sisters Of Mercy.

Now whilst 'Gone' certainly has some admirable qualities, after several plays I was left with an overwhelming sense of melancholy and depression. With the exception of 'A Black Symphony' and possibly 'In Control' (tracks five and six), the mid-tempo attitude leaves the listener with little in the way of inspiration. In fact several songs (if that is what they can loosely be described as) are positively downbeat and morose. The sombre theatrics may allude to a reflective cadence to some but the second half of 'Gone' generates no interest at all.

'My Fear' and 'Laudanum' get things off to a decent enough start and Grey's vocals are actually quite good. Bizarre as it may seem his voice, during 'Laudanum' especially, reminds me of former Asia singer John Payne. Piano and keyboards dominate the sound and it is only when the guitars break through on the aforementioned '...Symphony' and '...Control' that minimal sparks fly. The momentum is then lost completely as 'The Way I Die', 'Once' and others drag things to a merciful conclusion.

The album's producer is Chris Harms, singer and band leader of Lord Of The Lost. Apparently Grey showcased 'Gone' during an acoustic tour with LOTL back in April so I'm glad I wasn't in the audience for any of those shows.

'Gone' is not a piece of work to be listened to constantly and certainly not something to accompany the excellent summer climate we are currently experiencing. Maybe I'll return to it again in a few months, but only if the release schedule really falters during the back end of 2015.

Dave Bott

FOREIGNER – 'GREATEST HITS LIVE' *(earMUSIC)* MELODIC ROCK

Now the first thing I have to ask is "does the world need yet another live Foreigner album"? Well no, is the honest answer! That is especially true of one that is a ten year old recording and pretty much unrepresentative of what the band sounds like today.

That's not to say that they sound different or even the songs sound different, but essentially back in 2005 Kelly Hansen was the new kid on the block (having just joined the band) and the now long departed Jason Bonham was on timing duties. Hansen is, without doubt, in the "Top Ten Vocalists" in any Rock genre in the world, however on this particular recording he is, well how should I put this... completely like the "new guy at work" – clocks in, clocks out not having quite discovered how the system works in order to make the best of it.

I've had the pleasure of seeing the band live with Hansen on a few occasions and over the years he has made this role his own with his stage presence and charisma adding massively to what is (effectively) an armoury of hits that any singer would give his right arm to have the pleasure of singing. It could be said that over the years Hansen has put his own stamp on these songs and, if Foreigner purists will forgive me, made them his own in a live environment.

Standard Foreigner fare such as 'Head Games', 'Urgent' and ' Hot Blooded' all get the treatment with an eager crowd lapping it up, and even the Foreigner meets Led Zeppelin (just for a minute) of 'Juke Box Hero' sounds pretty damn good – mind you I'm sure Bonham's presence may have accounted for that little nod. The massive hit 'Waiting For A Girl Like You' is delivered and received exactly as you would expect, although nothing will ever come close to Lou Gramm's vocal on this song – which still makes the hairs on my neck stand up some thirty-four years later – whilst the Number 1 single 'I Want To Know What Love Is' is similarly delivered and received.

All in all this is a pretty good album, however as I said above, is yet another Foreigner live album an essential purchase? But then again, given the state of the record industry, a new Foreigner studio album isn't likely to happen either so if you are a fan, then this is another album you should have in your collection. But if you have just a passing or casual interest in the band, then it's not going to grab you, shake you and say "buy me". Good, damn good in fact, but sort of pointless.

Kieran Dargan

GHOST – 'MELIORA' *(Spinefarm)* HEAVY METAL

This one came straight out of the blue as I didn't know that Ghost were about to release a new album. I like Ghost, having first come across them at Download a couple of years ago and, liking what I heard as well as what I saw, I then went out and bought, yes bought, their albums. I know it's all a bit "Devil worshipry", but the music is usually very good and this (of course) makes up for it. 'Meliora' is, like the previous two, very good and it would be fair to say that actually this is even better than.

Starting off with some spooky stuff, this soon ends by getting blown away by some serious drumming from... whoever it is playing them. As we all know, none of us know who the band members are (the musicians are simply referred to as "nameless ghouls"), which all adds to their mystique of course. 'Spirit' is a good strong opening track, which sets you up for the rest of the album.

'From The Pinnacle To The Pit' starts with a thunderous bass riff, and Ghost's vocalist (who is simply referred to as Papa Emeritus) reminds me very much of Alice Cooper on this track. It also has some very good synth lines and atmospheric choir in the mix. 'Cirice' has a chorus that doesn't do what you expect when you first hear it, but once you get used to it it's very easy on the ear.

'He Is' is a song to worship "the wrong person" but it is fantastic musically, with a brilliant melody and really accomplished guitar and keyboards. It also starts with a little sequence that you can't get out of you head when you've heard it. 'Mummy Dust' is probably my least favourite, just because of the subject matter (speaks for itself), but once again, the music is there with the band playing the heaviest riffs on the album, with Emeritus singing like Lemmy Kilmister from Motörhead.

'Majesty' is a real stomper that Judas Priest would be proud of and 'Absolution' is shooting in the same area but with a little less intensity. 'Deus In Absentia' has an excellent middle eight tucked away inside and some glorious male choir at the end, but I don't know if this is the band themselves or someone else they have drafted in. I would like to think it

was the band.

This latest album is a certainly a progression on their previous recordings, and the band in turn gets stronger as it progresses. I look forward to hearing these tracks live.

Andy Brailsford

GRAVEYARD – 'INNOCENCE & DECADENCE' *(Nuclear Blast)* HARD ROCK

I was first introduced to Graveyard back in Issue #55 when they released their third album 'Lights Out', and was initially fooled into thinking they were some sort of Doom-orientated band due to their name and "none more black" album cover. However, I was more than pleasantly surprised with what I eventually heard.

You see, the Gothenburg quartet are a million miles away from the Melodic Rock currently peddled by the vast majority of their Swedish counterparts such as H.e.a.t, Eclipse and Treat etc. (some of my favourite bands might I add). With a retro sound that is distinctly late sixties and early seventies in style, and drawing in influences from a vast number of artists, Graveyard somehow manages to mesh it all together to create a quirky identity all of their own. The warm and fuzzy production techniques they enlist adding to the authenticity of their nostalgic style, though each instrument is perfectly audible.

Throughout 'Innocence & Decadence' you will hear references to the likes of Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, The Doors, Peter Green-era Fleetwood Mac, Steppenwolf, Hawkwind and Free; fast and furiously frantic Classic Rock/Metal-edged workouts drift into Space Rock Psychedelicness, head back towards Doom-laden riffs before turning towards meandering, brooding Blues workouts, then drift away into serenely haunting, almost ethereal passages – even a subtle Gospel influence creeps in along the way. It would be of no benefit for me to pinpoint specific tracks, as there is so much going on here, but suffice to say this is an album that is best served as a whole to appreciate the creativity that has gone into it.

In complete contrast to their previous album cover, the artwork of 'Innocence & Decadence' is stunning, surely adding to the appeal of the resurgence in the popularity of vinyl and a throwback to those pre-download days, while the mostly short-and-to-the-point songs and approximately forty minute running time complete that old-school feel.

Ant Heeks

GRENOUER – 'UNWANTED TODAY' *(Mausoleum)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

This eighth album from Russian Modern Metal band Grenouer is a nice blend of full-on riffs and Starset-like atmosphere. Pin sharp production does justice to songs like the title track and the seismic 'Something Really Bad' and the melody injected into the plethora of excellent songs brings to mind Breaking Benjamin's latest effort 'Dark Before Dawn', particularly on the down-tuned thud of 'On A Rainy Day'.

The fact that there is a more modern ebb and flow style evident on Starset's superb 'Transmission' album is evidence that style plagiarism is never a tactic that has crossed Grenouer's mind although 'Artificial Tears' also hits on the heavy guitar and squelching synthesiser approach to great effect.

If this album had been released by the likes of Mnemic, BB, Depswa or any other of the celebrated American Alternative Rock bands it would have been lauded and (rightly) gained critical acclaim. Luckily I'm here to tell you how good it is.

Yes they're Russian, yes this is on a Belgian Record label (once home to Molly Hatchet, Great White and Nazareth) and yes this probably won't ever be heard on American radio anytime soon; that doesn't mean that you shouldn't buy it.

Mike Newdeck

HEARTBREAK REMEDY – 'MIDNIGHT GROOVE' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

All right folks – it's midnight and time to get your groove on! 'Midnight Groove', the debut of new U.K. Rockers Heartbreak Remedy, is set to be unleashed in September!

This four-piece first saw the light of day in 2013 and for a young band, they have laid down some very tasty and also quite heavy Rock 'n' Blues. The group was founded by drummer Stephen Jackson and bassist Matty Penn (who also supplies the lead vocal chops) when they decided to put together a band that would be influenced by that Classic Rock sound from L.A. The group then expanded their sound with a twin guitar attack that is executed by Luke Blair and Callum Glynn – both also sweeten the vocal delivery by backing up Penn.

This band are no strangers to the stage; since their formation in 2013 until now, HR have taken up slots to open for a cacophony of Rocking bands that includes The Quireboys, Bad Touch, Knock Out Kaine and more recently Hardcore Superstar. Having previous released EP's to critical praise, the group are now set to unveil their first full-length studio album. So what do we hear on 'Midnight Groove' you all might ask?

The answer to that question is an infectious, full-blown, hardened Rock sound that does in fact groove to the nth degree, laying bare their influences from the likes of Mötley Crüe and ZZ Top to Deep Purple. There is a distinct sound and feel of these lads jamming well in to the wee small hours… creating these Rockers from their rehearsal room. Yes, they are heavy, however they are not ponderous; each selection is muscular yet full of melody with great guitar licks and a bottom end that is fluid as well as pulsating. Each number sits well in a groove that as this foursome play on, the sonics actually soar! This is a debut that is worthy of every Rocker's ears!

Heartbreak Remedy' are also set to take this scorcher on the road; a brand of Rock that will be delivered across the nation that is hot, heavy and thick. From festivals to smoke-filled rooms with dimly lit stages, we should get ready to have a 'Midnight Groove'. Thirteen slices of raucous Rock 'n' Roll (with two extra bonus tracks available on certain formats)…what a way to end the summer!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

HITHERSIDE – 'HITHERSIDE' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Hitherside is a part American, part Belgian and part Dutch Female-Fronted quartet that are actually based in Antwerp, Belgium. The project began in late 2011 with just Sam Oerlemans (multi-instrumentalist) and Jennifer Summers (vocals) but, after landing an endorsement deal with an audio-electronics company following the release of their first single/video 'Insignificant Other', the line-up was completed by Josh (bass) and Stefan (drums). The self-titled debut album is a self-produced and self-recorded effort and something of a labour of love that took three years to complete.

ICE BLUE – 'BACK TO THE LIGHT' *(RockCD)* MELODIC ROCK

Unfortunately, due this glorious magazine's bi-monthly publication, plus the myriad of bands trying desperately to get themselves noticed, there will always be some albums that surface some time (especially outside of their homeland) after their release date; Spain's Ice Blue is one such example.

The phrase "better late than never" is rather apt here as this is a very creditable AOR/Melodic Rock album and one worthy of your attention. Originating from Zaragoza in late 2000, the band released their self-titled debut in 2002 – I must confess I've not heard the album, however, the snippets of information I could gather were more than positive in their views and, if it is half as good as this sophomore opus (released back in January 2015), then I certainly will endeavour to obtain a copy… eventually.

It seems IB have always been a five-piece group but after several line-up changes (the most dramatic of which was the transformation to, and implementation of, Female-Fronted vocals in the eye-pleasing shape of Elena Cintora), they have now honed their talents to fashion a succulent, keyboard driven AOR feast with a side salad of unpretentious guitar and a healthy drizzle of effervescent rhythm.

Think back a decade or so to bands like Karma, Tour De Force, Talk Of The Town et al and you'll begin to get the picture. Cintora is wonderfully supported by Miguel Bravo (guitars, backing vocals), Guillermo Gutierrez (keys), Jose Simancas (bass) and Raul Alcubierre (drums) and from start to finish they produce one delight after another.

The lead single 'The Light Of This World' gets thing off to an impressive start; swirling keys, dynamic guitar interaction, gently throbbing rhythmic accompaniment and the sultry tones of Cintora (her accented delivery is noticeable, but certainly not disparaging). 'For Loving You', 'Don't Stop Dreaming', 'Don't You Break My Heart' and 'Turn On The Night' all follow in similar fashion – each one making you think 'I'm sure I recognise this'!

Yes, it's that type of album, where every melody and chorus is instantaneous in grabbing your attention and, by the second spin, you'll feel as though you've known these songs for years. This is potentially the album's "Achilles Heel" as its very safe AOR by numbers, but when it's this good... do we really dare to nitpick? 'Give Me Action' portrays the band's edgier side whilst 'Tears In The Dark', 'Always Be In My Mind' and 'Far Away From You' demonstrates a softer, slightly stripped-back temperament.

Ice Blue have in the past supported Dare, Harem Scarem, 91 Suite and Nexx (whatever happened to them?) to name but four, and I'm sure they'd be extremely grateful if you could now support them – I am! Recommended.

Dave Crompton

The style of Hitherside's material is primarily Gothic Metal with a few modern touches and though the bio mentions influences such as Halestorm and Evanescence, I'd say the music is more in line with the likes of Delain. Everything was written and arranged by Oerlemans and Summers and though there is now a bass player and drummer in place for live work, all the instruments on the album were played by Oerlemans.

It is obvious he is a talented guy because the playing and production is of a high standard. The guitars are pushed well forward in the mix, the riffs are bold with a great bite and the solos are imaginative, fitting well within the context of each song. For me however there are a couple of shortfalls on 'Hitherside'... major shortfalls.

The first is that all the songs seem like a series of verses and bridges searching for a decent chorus. The second relates to Summers; she has power and a good range but the monotone delivery is uninspiring and becomes something of a distraction as the album progresses. Added to the missing hooks this means that the songs lack identity and the singular-paced-tempo simply enhances the problem. Some may call the vocals ethereal but I'm willing to say (for me personally) they are just boring. Each song begins promisingly enough but when the singing starts the frustration kicks in and that is a feature throughout.

Oerlemans is certainly an artist to keep an eye on, both as a musician and a producer, but I feel a re-think is needed if the band is to progress to the next level, raise their profile and make an impact. I get slightly uncomfortable singling out individuals when giving a negative opinion on someone's work, but having lived with Hitherside constantly for a few days and having others share my experience, unfortunately I am not alone in my thoughts.

Dave Bott

HUNGRYHEART – 'DIRTY ITALIAN JOB' *(Tanzan)* HARD ROCK

Hungryheart is the brain child of guitarist Mario Percudani (Lionville/Mitch Malloy) drummer Paulo Botteschi, singer Josh Zighetti and bassist Stefano Scola. 'Dirty Italian Job' is the third effort from the band after a gap of five years with their previous two albums being a self-titled debut from 2008 and 'One Ticket To Paradise' from 2010. So what effect have the past five years had on the band...in terms of growth, musicianship and song-writing... massive? '...Job' is a huge step up in class and one big enough to mix it with the big boys.

Kicking off with the superb 'There's A Reason For Everything' kind of sets out the stall for what's in store – powerful and soulful Melodic Hard Rock with just a hint of attitude. Zighetti is one of the few foreign singers not to sing in heavily accented English, in fact whilst he is not perfect, it's about as good as it gets. 'Shoreline' is yet another rather excellent Melodic Rock ditty with a pro shot video if you feel like searching online. The Funky 'Devil's Got My Number', think Guardian circa 'Miracle Mile' with a definite nod towards 'Shoeshine Johnny', is rather splendid. The cover of Eric Clapton's 'Bad Love' is unexpected, however I have to admit the guys have done a superb job at carrying off one of his more instant tracks – I hit the repeat button on this a few times.

Staying with the love theme 'Second Hand Love' has a bit of 'Wanted Dead Or Alive' Bon Jovi about it, that acoustic intro and, of course, if anyone ever mentions "a six string on my back" I guess you are asking for that comparison. 'You Can Run' also deserves a mention as does the hard hitting 'Rock Steady'. Album closer 'All Over Again' has a little Danger Danger about it, that mid-paced swagger associated with tracks such as 'Don't Walk Away'. All in

all, despite name-checking a few more established bands, this is very much a Hungryheart album, one drafted old-school in the studio with heart and soul.

Hungryheart have delivered an excellent album, chock full of melody and, above all, they display some wonderful song-writing and musicianship. Please go out of your way to get a copy of this, it deserves to be heard. In a world where the big boys dominate the airwaves, it's nice to see a relatively unknown act stick their collective heads above the parapet.

Not the finished article, but the growth from 2008 to 2015 is self-evident and the next one could just be "THE" one! In the meantime 'Dirty Italian Job' needs to be heard – go on, treat yourself, you know it makes sense.

Kieran Dargan

JEFF FETTERMAN – 'BOTTLE FULL OF BLUES' *(Green Tea)* BLUES/SOUL

Jeff Fetterman hails from Pennsylvania and has a pretty impressive pedigree, including winning WREO Ohio Radio "Best Up & Coming Blues Artist" and supporting the likes of Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Molly Hatchett, .38 Special and Ana Popovic. 'Bottle Full Of Blues' is his second album after a fifteen year gap and rather fine it is too. Fetterman is a Blues Rock guitarist with plenty of feel and this Funked up Blues album is very easy to listen to, especially if SRV and Blues Traveller are your kind of bag.

'Paradise' is a Blues Funk opener which sets the tone for some superior guitar licks and Fetterman's gravelly voice, this leads on nicely to the equally Funky but more Bluesy 'Out Of Time' which has a Hammondy keyboard solo from Anthony Brown. Brown ramps up the Boogie on 'Southbound' and, along with the harp of Otis James, this is a band you could be downing a few beers to in a jumping, smoky bar.

Title track 'Bottle Full Of Blues' is a smoochy, languid Blues ballad in the style of Joe Bonamassa; Fetterman channels a pretty good Bluesy Sammy Hagar on vocals. There's a change of tempo with 'Funky Candy' featuring the supporting vocals of Judy Kessler and some more Funky bass from Ralph Reitinger, this is probably the most hooky song on the album.

'Devil's Shuffle' is just straight old Southern Bar Blues. I really like the choppy Funk of 'Talk To Me', Fetterman soaks the voice in whisky and Kessler gives it some punchy top end. 'Down And Out' is possibly my favourite track; I like the groove and the John Popper-esque Blues harp. On to the smoother 'Wash My Blues Away' where the backing vocals bring a more Gospel feel, which then morphs into 'Angel Blue' and finally Funks its way off into the sunset with 'T Bone & The Ghost' which may become one of my favourite song titles.

'Bottle Full of Blues' is an eminently easy to listen to album and Fetterman and the rest of the band are a talented ensemble that plays with great feel. I suspect Fetterman will suffer a little from the fact that he is one of many great Blues men but his songs, whilst good, are slightly too derivative to make them stand out clearly amongst the vast field. To be fair, a good many of Bonamassa's songs don't necessarily stand out either but he got the break, so maybe Jeff Fetterman will too.

Helen Bradley Owers

IO EARTH – 'NEW WORLD' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

IO Earth work in cycles; 2009 providing their self-titled debut, 2012 the much lauded follow-up 'Moments', and now three years later we have 'New World'. The reason for these lengthy gaps? Well, purely to give the band time to craft and hone albums which, through a wealth of worthy material, evolve into two hour long, two disc entities; '...World' is no different.

If you've never experienced this band before, simply revel in the opening double of 'Move As One' – a floating piece which introduces new (to the studio) singer Linda Odinsen in remarkable style – before the Prog/Folk/Metal crossover 'Redemption' spins your head completely in the opposite direction. This is properly Progressive music, performed with a wide scope of influences and unafraid to mix things up; jagged riffs and thunderous drums as likely to drive the songs forward as violins, synths or Odinsen's seductive (and powerful when the need arises) voice, all to persuade you that '...World' has real depth.

'Journey To Discovery' oscillates on a bulging beat, Odinsen offering a truly breathtaking vocal bursting with energy, while the loosely Celtic Folk of 'Morning' whispers past on the breeze, acoustic guitar and gentle tambourine punctuated by piano, synths, flute, mandolin and once again that glorious voice – this time soothing and calming.

The journey continues beautifully and energetically on disc two, the album, while not conceptual, is based round engaging themes of discovery, overcoming adversity and moving on to better times. 'Insomnia' is an unsettling second opener, IOE brave enough to ease you in with a clockwork-like beat which gives way to expertly arranged strings, before the song explodes into a full-on Prog Metal workout where Dave Cureton confidently cranks his guitar up a notch.

'The Rising' takes the bold move of adding narration centred round the events of 9/11 as the song winds into life in a restrained, yet still unavoidably ear catching style, confirming that it's these metamorphosing atmospheres and textures which really set IOE apart from other bands in this sphere. '...World' closes on the superb title track, the most anthemic piece across these two discs played out on a pulsating beat and driving rhythm which is interspersed with yet more lush soundscapes and stunning vocals.

The production from Miguel Seco is second to none and if you ever required proof that independently released albums can compete on every level with the labels (the double fold out digi-pack is also exquisite), then it's right here. Amazingly across nearly two hours of music, IOE create combinations of style and substance which truly sets them apart from their peers and avoids obvious influences or a reliance on well worn structures avoided. That in itself is to be applauded, but when the results are this good, it's difficult not to be completely bowled over.

Welcome to the 'New World', welcome to IO Earth.

Steven Reid

JOE MCGURK – 'ELEMENTS' *(Lion)* INSTRUMENTAL

Joe McGurk is the guitarist for the Prog Metal band Opposing Motion and has just released his first solo album 'Elements'. With a nod to Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons', this instrumental album provides interpretations of the primary elements – 'Wind', 'Fire', 'Water' and 'Earth'. As you can imagine, this presents an opportunity for a bit of variety in the music.

On the whole though, we are talking Progressive Speed Metal, so if he was paid for every note played on the album, McGurk would be a rich man indeed. Light and shade is abundant though, with the quieter moments filled quite heavily with Flamenco Guitar, especially on 'Elements – (For Guitar And Orchestra)'. The use of Flamenco and Classical Guitar provides a perfect foil for McGurk's extreme guitar solos utilising unusual scales and employing supreme dexterity in pulling them off. The guitar solos (both acoustic and electric) are smooth, fast and melodic and it is clear McGurk is a formidable player.

Following the four elements pieces, the final track is split into three movements (the aforementioned 'Elements...', 'Movement II: Requiem (Lacrymosa)' and 'Movement III: Grand Finale'). The first two movements set up the closer replete with extreme guitar playing and a white knuckle ride complete with the sound of the wind and rain permeating through the piece.

The Flamenco acoustic style rather than the Bach-influenced Neo-Classical playing of Yngwie Malmsteen makes Joe McGurk hard to pigeon-hole. For an instrumentalist this is probably a good thing; the heavy orchestration of pieces such as 'Requiem...' move the album more into a Metal Symphony rather than just a Metal guitar-shredding fest.

Give 'Elements' a try if this description whets your appetite.

Rob McKenzie

JOHN WETTON – 'THE STUDIO RECORDING ANTHOLOGY VOLUME 1' *(Primary Purpose)* ROCK

It's easy to see John Wetton's career as bits of this and that with a massive slice of Asia in the middle; short times with King Crimson, Roxy Music, UK and then those ten chart busting years. But it's more than that; with Asia now reconstituted, it's a great time for a recollection of Wetton's solo work and this double release, with impressive packaging plus honest and well-written notes from Nick Shilton, is a worthy vehicle.

Never afraid to make big and grand music, the classical intention of some of this might surprise and entrance, the noisier fare might make you stroke your chin, the whole thing might go in one ear and stay around for a few bars before exiting the other. It's not that this is bad, clearly that isn't the case, but it is a little reserved, grown up and shows that Icon "pouring syrup all over the mixing desk" sound.

Best stuff here is the bright Rock of 'Another Twist Of The Knife', the tumbling drums and organ of 'Lost For Words', saxing us up on 'Caught In The Crossfire', 'The Last Thing On My Mind' is well fed, 'Heart Of Darkness' sounds big and important with a Supertramp solo and 'Cold Is The Night' is soft and sexy, mixing a fluid cocktail of a chorus. Lastly, 'Raised In Captivity' is so simple that it will listen to no complaints and wins that way.

There are thirty-two tracks here. That can sometimes cause a little boredom to break out. That would happen for most artists of course, but big, important, grand sounding music mixed with plaintive acoustic pieces and classically-inclined offers, sometimes just makes things a little samey.

And Wetton is anything but. Listen to the great music he has produced with those bands. Read his story, the drinking, the success, the fallouts, and the honest appraisals of what he wanted to do with each album; this is an artist who has followed his heart in his solo work and he should be honoured for that. Listen to it, it's clear what a talent he is; just do it in small doses, that's all...

Steve Swift

JOHN WETTON AND THE LES PAUL TRIO – 'NEW YORK MINUTE' *(Cherry Red)* ROCK

Mr Wetton, with two releases this month you are spoiling us. Undeniably recorded for a good cause – prostate cancer awareness – this live album from New York's Iridium theatre in 2013 with the clearly excellent Les Paul Trio shows some songs that Wetton likes delivered in a stripped down version.

You can bathe in the warm feeling that giving to charity can provide, because this disc is not on fire... or even smouldering. In fact, it's difficult to locate the blue touch paper. It's nonchalant, relaxed and gentle; he's having fun, but are we? Well, we might struggle. 'Do It Again' benefits from the laidback Steely Dan original vibe but 'What's Going On' is just not cool, has none of the sway of Marvin Gaye; 'God Only Knows' has a chorus to match the sweep of the song and 'All Along The Watchtower' goes for a bit more Rock and is all the better for it – hard to mess up a great song like this though.

He can't sustain 'Lady Madonna' and its thumping attack with just piano and voice and a similar 'Heat Of The Moment' just has no grandeur. This is a familiar call throughout; it's all a bit too safe and satisfactory.

Good to hear Wetton trying some new things, but this one is for great fans really; for the rest of us, this 'New York Minute' might not be short enough.

Steve Swift

JUPITER FALLS – 'REVOLUTION' *(Broken Road)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

This is a confident start for this aspiring Rock band from Leeds. Produced by Roy Z, it proves they've got something going for them when they can rope in such a well known and well respected name.

The disc plants its feet in the Modern Rock camp with some of the power of Avenged Sevenfold but also has a go at the more melodic approach of Shinedown. It's angsty with a mix of styles and, at times, even reminded me of Glasgow's Logan with its post Grunge stance laced with hooks. Another touchstone would be Metallica, mostly due to James Hart's similarity to James Hetfield in places.

'Awake' is a good opener, showing off power and confidence but the standout is 'World War Three' as it's the song with the hook that sticks best after repeated listens. One song that bucks the general trend of the Modern Rock sound is 'Chasing The Dragon' which has the low down, scuzzy L.A. feel of 'Appetite For Destruction' era Guns 'N' Roses, from its Izzy Stradlin and Slash style guitar work to Hart's Axl Rose style vocals. Whilst it's not in-keeping with the songs around it, this is one of the strongest in terms of plain Hard Rock fun.

The songs are heavy with a U.S. propensity to find hummable hooks. Technically, it's very good with a balance of power and melody that could translate well live, however this British

band still have to find that truly special song (or songs) that will really lift them above all the other new young bands who are also inspired by those Classic Rock and 1990's bands.

Duncan Jamieson

KEITH THOMPSON BAND – 'CATCH THE FIRE' *(Density)* BLUES/SOUL

Keith Thompson and has been doing his thing in Europe for twenty years now; plenty of time, over seven albums, to solidify your sound. And he has. It is so solid that there is little opportunity for development. These tracks don't really break out of the Blues Rock feel, but whilst they wander round, they are quite companionable.

Barring an unnecessary faithful version of 'Little Wing', 'Breathe' is restlessly Funky with a Richie Kotzen chorus that will not quit and a bloody bass solo to boot, 'Keeper Of The Flame' lays back further than even George Clooney can and is every bit as cool, when a sax parps and the solo breaks out of 'Crazy' and an organ drives a propulsive Classically Rocking 'Getting Ready For The Burn', this is a parcel of beautifully wrapped goodies.

You might also finding yourself surrounded by wrapping paper and frowning or shrugging though. 'Money' is a basic Blues shuffle and 'Wrong Side Of The Bed' is a Country twang which works only in parts, good to look at but steadfastly refusing to go anywhere.

Mixed bag... curate's egg... patchy picture... any of those will stick; terribly large talent here, tittilatingly transient. This fire keeps going out.

Steve Swift

KELLY KEELING – 'MIND RADIO' *(Frontiers)* MELODIC ROCK

'Mind Radio' marks a return to a Melodic Rock sound for the popular American vocalist Kelly Keeling, who most genre fans love from his time with (the quite frankly) awesome Baton Rouge. Keeling has an amazing voice and he doesn't disappoint here, his vocals are probably the star and also the most impressive thing about this album; it makes you want to scream from the rooftops that we need more Melodic Rock/AOR albums from the man!

Keeling works with some outside writers but does have a strong hand in the song-writing, which is great to see. Overall '...Radio' is essentially a straight ahead, no nonsense pure AOR collection and I'm sure most established Keeling fans will be overjoyed for the opportunity to hear him sing in this vein, I know I am.

Given the writers involved you won't be surprised to learn that this album is full of full-frontal, thrilling keyboards, strong guitar hooks and spine tingly effective choruses. As much as I like this album, and I know the average AOR fan will enjoy '...Radio' a lot, it does feel a little safe at times. Now that's not totally a bad thing, but the album does lack a little spark that would get me more excited.

For those of you salivating to hear new BR music you're in for a treat here as three of the songs have a strong BR feel with a heavier groove than the more AOR driven tracks. 'Who Do You Run To' is probably my favourite of the trio and it's a real album highlight, but Rouge fans should definitely crank up 'Monkey House' and 'Written in Fire' too.

It's a solid album but I have to point out that Robert Sall's contributions are pretty awesome; 'Ride Out The Storm' and 'Frozen In Time' are straight out of the Work Of Art mould and, as you'd expect, ultra melodic. One of my personal favourites is 'Still Need You In My Arms' which is pure AOR to the max and is from the Journey book of song-writing.

I also have to highlight Italian guitarist Mario Percudani who also performs some awesome guitar licks and hooks that have really imbedded themselves on my consciousness! The guitar lick in the verses on 'Isolated Man' is simply sublime.

'Mind Radio' should satisfy Kelly Keeling's fans desire to hear more straight ahead Melodic Rock music from the man and should be on most AOR fans wish-lists. The humungous choruses on this album are destined to blow up every self-respecting AOR fans speakers this summer! Crank it up and sing along!

Paul Woodward

KEZIA – 'THE DIRTY AFFAIR' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

In 2013, three old friends – keyboard player Alberto Armanini, guitarist Antonio Maneti and singer Peirlorenzo Molinari – decided to write together for the first time and so the band Kezia was born. The quintet is completed by Fabio Bellini and Michele Longhena, however the latter two did not play on this album length EP and the bass and drums were handled by Andrea Piovani and Matteo Vigani respectively.

The band cite influences from the likes of Queen, Deep Purple, Protest The Hero, Dream Theater, Faith No More, Frank Zappa and Toto and all these can be heard throughout the thirty-five minutes of what can best described as the Pop Metal of 'The Dirty Affair'. I would also add Muse to that list as any fans of the "super-group" generally or their last two albums specifically will find a lot to like here.

'Before I Leave' sets out what the band is all about with multiple time changes, riffs galore, guitar solos, multi-layered keyboards and bizarre lyrics. The synth openings of 'Ebola' soon metamorphose into a glorious fusion of Zappa and DT and, depending on your musical view-point, this is either utter nonsense or utter genius (I am of the latter opinion).

Unlikely as it is, things get just weirder with the title track, which is one of the strangest songs you are ever likely to encounter in any genre, although 'The Dirty Affair (Between Pelican & Bear)' is still an example of Progressive Rock at its most bombastic. 'Sneakers' has an almost Steely Dan intro before more or less turning into something resembling a standard Pop single, almost.

The final four tracks are all part of 'The Diebella's Method' starting with the frenetic 'Barabba Son's Song' that has an instrumental section straight out of the DT school of writing. 'Quendo Intro' continues on similar theme whilst the all too-short 'Preludio' heralds the introduction of the final song, the seven-minute plus epic of 'Treesome'.

The musicianship is phenomenal and despite more time changes than The Terminator box-set, Kezia have managed to construct songs that are both catchy and complex in the same degree. The mastering by Ricardo Frigoni has resulted in an album that sonically matches the heavyweights of the genre such as Steve Wilson and Neal Morse.

With 'The Dirty Affair', Kezia have stuck a flag in the ground and announced their arrival to the Prog World in a big way.

Mark Donnelly

KADAVAR – 'BERLIN' *(Nuclear Blast)* HARD ROCK

Kadavar hit the musical radar in 2012 with their self-titled debut album, and by the time they joined up with Nuclear Blast for 'Abra Kadavar', they had really began to make waves on the Retro Rock scene, helped greatly by their constant gigging. The recent follow-up, 'Live In Antwerp', was a superb representation of their high-octane stage performance.

It would be easy to have just continued with the formula they had perfected, but instead they have steered away from the past and embraced a more experimental sound that stretches out to the beyond.

The influence of early Deep Purple is soaked within on 'Lord Of The Sky' and it is a fine opener, while the Black Sabbath sounding 'Last Living Dinosaur' has a commanding vocal from Christoph "Lupus" Lindemann as well as some droning guitar work.

Things get interesting during 'The Old Man', which is a slow paced riff with a warmer vocal approach and a fine example of where Kadavar have clearly emerged as impressive song-writers. 'Circles In My Mind' is closer to the bands earlier material, but on 'Thousand Miles Away' they explore more subtle textures vocally as well as in the guitar approach.

One of the most bizarre songs on offer is the bonus track 'Reich Der Träume' which, when translated from German, means 'Realm Of Dreams' and is a cover from cult singer Nico. It is a Psychedelic mixture of melancholy melodies with only vocals and keyboards and, in truth, it bears more than a passing resemblance to fellow Germans Tangerine Dream in its delivery.

In conclusion, this is without doubt Kadavar's most accomplished and varied musical offering to date.

Ray Paul

KINGCROW – 'EIDOS' *(Sensory)* PROGRESSIVE

If ever there was a nation suited to producing quality Progressive Rock music it should be Italy; a country which established itself as long time champions of the likes of Genesis and their early seventies peers and Prog Rock pioneers. These soon to become Prog Rock giants wowed the Italians in their early days with their quirky and intelligent Progressive compositions and the feeling was mutual. For all their passion for the Progressive form, their own Prog outpourings have come through a number of bands, yet widespread success seems to be mainly restricted to acts such as PFM and more recently Ranestrane.

However, plodding steadily along since their inception in 1996 have been Kingcrow and this six-piece outfit's latest offering, 'Eidos', symmetrically appears as their sixth album. Being a name which might not ring any bells, what does 'Eidos' have to offer?

Moving steadily from their Hard Rock roots and exploring a more ambitious route in composing seems to be the key to their appeal, Kingcrow aren't afraid of throwing in the odd crushing chord or heading off at tangent to explore various atmospheres and ambiences; for example take a listen to 'Open Sky' where the dreamy quality of the washes of keyboards and lead and acoustic guitars perfectly captures the song title. They also comfortably launch themselves into longer formed pieces – 'At The Same Pace' driving along on a wave of melodic guitar before, perhaps unexpectedly from the title, a change of pace kicks in. The title track is another such selection which is more ambitious in its construction, full of angular riffs and jerky rhythms.

'Fading Out (Part IV)' is the latest part in a sequence that began on 2006's 'Timetropia' – just the sort of things that Prog fans love – and like 'The Deeper Divide', provides an acoustic-based element in contrast to the more prevailing electric nature of the album. Add to that a drummer with the apt name of Manuel Thundra Cafolla combined with tight arrangements and clean production and you have a quality album which opens up another door in the Progressive arena for fans of the genre to discover.

Having recently listened to new records in the same field from Transience and Leprous, Kingcrow are in good company in flying the flag for contemporary Progressive Rock and Metal. No way are they out of their depth and this being the first time many may have come across a recommendation for Kingcrow's music, what awaits afterwards is the pleasure and the thrill of discovering their back catalogue.

Mike Ainscoe

KLOGR – 'MAKE YOUR STAND' *(Zeta Factory)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Marketed as an EP, this is essentially the third album (thirteen tracks at over an hour) from the Italian/American Alternative Metal band Klogr. Featuring three new studio cuts, ten live tracks and a DVD boasting a documentary and a live performance in Trezzo sull'Adda, this pretty much covers all the bases from top to bottom.

With a sound that incorporates elements of Tool, Perfect Circle, the riff heavy sound of Metallica and the more traditional guitar elements of Iron Maiden, the whole package makes for some interesting listening.

Vocalist Gabriele "Rusty" Rustichelli seems far happier when he's belting out the live material – as found on the pummelling 'Draw Closer ' or the more Progressive Metal-like sounding 'Vultures Feast' – than he does on the new studio material where his accent is more pronounced and the notes he hits slightly less convincing.

However if you dismiss the new songs as a bonus, this then becomes a rather excellent live album in its own right, capturing the energy and the heaviness admirably on songs like the chugging 'Silk And Thorns' or the full-on Metal assault of 'Bleeding'.

The fact that it's teamed with all the other extras makes this a package well worth owning whether you're a diehard fan or not.

Mike Newdeck

LANDMARQ – 'ROADSKILL: LIVE IN THE NETHERLANDS' *(Synergy/Cherry Red)* PROGRESSIVE

Of course, this is not a standard live album; this is a live re-imagining of Landmarq's last, very well received, studio album 'Entertaining Angels'. And why not, they are a well regarded band and it is a smashing album.

Landmarq were given a lemon and made lemonade. When Damian Wilson left, they finally decided on a completely new vocal sound (after a year with Ian Gould) with Tracy Hitchings. And she is the shining light here; soulful, Folky and sometimes Bjorkian sounds make this full music sound even bigger, her dramatic side is a lovely surprise too.

Not that the band are slouches; this stunning live document from a Netherlands concert is sometimes distorted in the sound but not in the playing. The crowd are genteel but keen, the atmosphere sounds poised and the music is great.

Of the tracks you get, the killer items are the beautiful 'Personal Universe', which opens out to reveal love and light, and 'Thunderstruck', with its busy, bubbly brouhaha and stunning organ solo alongside Uwe D'Rose's fluid guitar work; both are big and clever. The crowd also love the pushy, thickset attack, the duelling lines and the 1980's twinkling of 'Calm Before The Storm'.

In fact, they should have finished on this big build as the closing album title track is a little quiet in comparison. That quibble aside though, 'Roadskill' is just what it says, a band in their absolute pomp and at the peak of their powers – that they use it judiciously to add soul, heartstring tugging and gargantuan groove, is incredibly impressive. Heaven only knows where they'll go next...

Steve Swift

LEVEE DWELLERS – 'LEVELING UP' *(Blueshine)* BLUES/SOUL

Formed by five Rotterdam-based musicians, Levee Dwellers are a Blues band who have based their music around the impressive voice of Daniëlla Eerhart. Starting out as a covers band, the quintet began writing their own songs and this, their debut album, features that mixture of material.

Kicking things off with Ann Peeble's track 'Beware', the first thing that strikes me is what a great voice Eerhart has. There is no trace of an accent (which I personally find a bit of a deal breaker) and the band bolster their sound with the use of a saxophone player, which brings to mind the music found in The Blues Brothers which I return to frequently when I don't want to Rock out.

James Hunter's 'Kick It Around' is delivered equally well and the choice of covers is inspiring – LD haven't gone for all the obvious choices (there's not a Robert Johnson song to be seen) and instead are picking tracks I distantly remember or have had no prior contact with. Junior Well's 'Hoodoo Man' is classic chill-out music and Willie Dixon's 'Built For Comfort' is sure to get you swinging. The band are only too happy to bring some contemporary Blues into their repertoire too, doing a sterling job of covering Matt Schofield's 'On My Way'.

Their own compositions are none too shabby either, as 'Boogie You Down' is not a million miles away from early ZZ Top in style. 'The Empress Of Big Willy's' is brilliant, with Eerhart delivering a vocal that reminds me of the material Beth Hart cut with Joe Bonamassa. Jeroen Heeselaars' saxophone work is a revelation and the rhythm section of Onno Röell and Ed Weeda lock everything down for Stefan Soares to noodle over on guitar.

The record is beautifully produced – the drums are crisp, the bass fat and warm, the saxophone raspy, the guitars bright and the vocals powerful and clear. Everything has its place and the album is a fabulous listen. It's very Blues-orientated so it you're simply looking to Rock, move along. However, if you want to chill to some first rate 12-bar workouts, I've not had many Blues albums I've enjoyed this much for quite some time.

James Gaden

LOFFT – 'FOLLOW TO SURVIVE' *(Make Big)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

'Follow To Survive' is a straight-forward Heavy Rock album by German band Lofft. It's a dramatic album with no frills but one that frequently lacks variety in song-writing.

The album opens with a roughed-up sound on 'Follow To Survive' and strong, unrestrained vocals from singer Torger. 'All I Ever Wanted' has a touch of Power Metal, especially with the high-pitched, rolling guitar work behind the chorus. Punchy rhythmic riffs keep things simple during the verses and the whole pace and tone is a bit more modern in style.

Lofft's self-confessed talent is for writing ballads. The first, 'Make Me Forgotten', lacks concrete vocal pitch and the hard-hitting emotional climax of a ballad gets lost in the indistinct melody. 'Power To Destroy' picks up the pieces of its predecessor with a more moving melody and strung out guitar; I'm still not sure it really packs a power ballad punch though. 'Talented To Hurt', apart from being lyrically clever, has the best urgency and feeling of the three, especially the fractured, pulsating pre-chorus half way through.

Torger's vocals hit home best on 'Inferior' where he has intensity and a rasping, almost frenzied passion. Lofft don't get bogged down in "too much going on" in the songs but tracks like 'Big Black Hole' and 'Pants Down' do very little to stand out. Influences like Volbeat come out in 'Ready To Pay', one of the heavier tracks, but also one where Torger's voice wanders off again. 'You Are Losing' is by far the catchiest track, one that combines the modern pace and heavier, more disjointed sound of Lofft.

There's a touch of misery to the whole album but without making it miserable. Instead it gives the music a toughened, raw edge and seeks out your inner head-banger (if you do indeed keep it locked inside).

It's sometimes too indistinct to be catchy but you can't deny it stirs feeling.

Sophie Brownlee

LUCIFER'S FRIEND – 'AWAKENING' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

A band I thought would never again be a going concern, Seventies Classic Rock band Lucifer's Friend are probably most famous in the U.K. for supporting Black Sabbath and having former Uriah Heep singer John Lawton in their ranks. Lawton was an original member of the German Rockers when they formed way back in 1968, left to join Heep for the well-received 'Firefly', 'Innocent Victim' and 'Fallen Angel' albums in the late seventies, and rejoined Lucifer's Friend for their last year before splitting up in 1982. Hindsight has put an interesting slant on their career, their 1970 debut in particular being lauded for pioneering Hard Rock, Progressive, Doom and Speed Metal, although the last one is a bit of a stretch. This double disc set features a ten track compilation on the first disc and a newly recorded EP on the second.

Their debut album is well represented with no less than four tracks, of which 'Ride The Sky' and 'In The Time Of Job' both give Heep and Deep Purple a run for their money with their Hammond-led Hard Rock sound, but it's the Doomy undertones of 'Keep Going' and 'Toxic Shadows' that are more interesting, with great vocals from Lawton and Dieter Horns' killer bass lines. Always an eclectic bunch, subsequent records each had their own distinct flavour, the Progressiveness of the next three are largely ignored with just guitarist Peter Hesslein's acoustic-based 'Burning Ships' and 'Dirty Old Town' being the simplest songs from their respective albums. By 1976 they'd thrown in their lot with catchier Hard Rock, of which 'Fugitive' and 'Moonshine Rider' (from the 'Mind Exploding' album) are particularly good examples, and ignoring the two records they made with singer Mike Starrs while Lawton was with Heep, they made the underrated 'Mean Machine' when he returned in 1981, showcased here by the commercial 'Fire And Rain' (spot the Jefferson Starship keyboard stabs) and the lively Rocker 'Hey Driver'.

Original drummer Joachim "Addi" Rietenbach is sadly no longer with us and keyboardist Peter Hecht wasn't interested in the reunion, but Lawton, Hesslein and Horns are giving it another shot with four refreshingly old-school tunes. Both the Pompy 'Riding High' and the majestic 'Did You Ever' have tempo changes on the chorus and the wonderful 'Pray' has all the old hallmarks, and whilst 'This Road' attempts and fails to be more modern with some really odd keyboard parts, Lawton's voice is exactly as it was in their heyday and the songs are well recorded.

Lucifer's Friend sadly never achieved the level of success as many of their peers, but this album and their appearance at the Sweden Rock Festival suggest they deserved more.

Phil Ashcroft

KINETIC ELEMENT – 'TRAVELOG' *(Melodic Revolution)* PROGRESSIVE

Begin with the view that there's genuine beauty in Yes' music and you won't find many naysayers in this readership. Posit the idea that a lot of that beauty is from Steve Howe's playing and you'll receive many nods. His tone, the air in his playing, particularly the acoustic, is gorgeous; Kinetic Element know this, as it's all over this rather affecting second release. But not so much the 1970's business, this has the brittle, angular brilliance of his solo turn from the GTR album 'Sketches in The Sun' and is all the better for it.

This awaited album is steeped in 1970's style; not seen through the prism of 2015 and not commenting ironically on it. The style and just the style and as such, it is wonderful to be with. The Virginian band describe themselves as new Symphonic Progressive, but they are far more interesting than that; this is glorious old-school Prog with no ifs, buts or soundscapes. They are just not afraid to take nine minutes and mine one seam, the gentle, lilting 'Travelog' with a plangent flute, but neither are they afraid to bear their breasts when needed or required; 'War Song' is a Prog masterwork, not in the tricks it can provide but the 1970's brilliance it shows. This track has sweeping guitar lines, rising organs (and who could mind that?), martial drums and skirl of pipes, guitar, organ and bass solos – such gorgeous Proggy travels.

And among these five, twenty, nineteen and eleven or so minute tracks, there is good stuff all over the place. They have something else excellent too; a Jazzy, cool groove that Andy Tillison uses to such fantastic effect with The Tangent; when they uncork this, there is no going back. Played with talent to spare, adding different elements (kinetic indeed); slithering synth solos, soaring guitars, thickly organs, even whistling – all in the same song. And because they have a groove, Messrs (Mike) Visaggio (keys & vocals), (Michael) Murray (drums & vocals), (Todd) Russell (guitars) and (Mark) Tupko (bass) are not just bolting stuff together, they are organically growing old style Prog with such bright colours that fans from all over the world will flock to them. That is if there's any justice.

Good Progressive Rock should be a journey. You won't need Trip Advisor, this Travelog is entertaining enough.

Steve Swift

LYNCH MOB – 'REBEL' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Returning to Frontiers for the first time since 2009's 'Smoke And Mirrors', guitarist George Lynch and singer Oni Logan continue what is probably their most stable reunion thus far with this follow-up to last year's 'Sun Red Sun', extending what recording-wise has been the busiest period of Lynch's illustrious career. Drafting in drumming animal Brian Tichy (ex-Whitesnake) and long-time cohort Jeff Pilson (Foreigner) on bass is an astute move as both have historical links and highly individual styles that certainly add something to the fairly traditional Hard Rock of 'Rebel', albeit with some of Lynch's expected modern touches in the guitar sounds and the production.

'Automatic Fix' sets the scene for the whole album with a heady mix of old-school riffs, heavy bass and dark vocals, and whilst that description might be enough to put off the ones who only liked 'Wicked Sensation', Tichy's phenomenal drumming, a Bluesy breakdown and trademark Lynch solo anchor this a little nearer to their most popular album. Similarly 'Between The Truth And A Lie', 'Sanctuary' and 'Pine Tree Avenue' may be a little lacking in the hook department, but they have great grooves and recognisable Lynch Mob traits. Logan's vocal lifts the lumbering Rocker 'Testify' a touch and 'Dirty Money' sounds a little too much like the old standard 'For The Love Of Money' (covered by Bulletboys, Utopia etc.), but other than the infectious heavy Funk of the Lynch Mob meets Mother's Finest tune 'Jelly Roll', most of the best moments seem to be in the second half of the disc.

'The Hollow Queen' is an obvious winner, very melodic with neat vocal melodies, a great guitar solo and an urgent rhythm section, whilst 'The Ledge' has more of an atmospheric Queensryche/Dream Theater feel with different guitar tones and Logan using his lower register; it's quite subtle and works really well. I wasn't too sure about 'Kingdom Of Slaves' at first, but the dark-edged Blues Rocker has a stunning middle eight and guitar solo, the Eastern-tinged 'War' bringing the album to a close with a rush of adrenaline and perhaps the best solo on the album, even if sections of it sound a little overly familiar.

Well-produced, mixed and mastered by Chris Collier, 'Rebel' is close to '...Mirrors' in style and sound, but with Logan's new-found depth as a lyricist giving a more serious and less "party" vibe. It won't be for everyone but there's plenty to like here.

Phil Ashcroft

LYNYRD SKYNYRD – 'SWEET HOME ALABAMA' *(Eagle Records)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Think of Southern Rock and ultimately the first band that springs to mind is the triple guitar attack of the legendary Lynyrd Skynyrd. This month is a real treat for Skynyrd fans with not one but two multi CD/DVD releases.

The first of these is 'Sweet Home Alabama' that was originally released as a DVD only

package back in 2008. It captures the band on top form at Rockpalast's Loreley Festival on the 23 June 1996 and is notable for being one of the first ever performances with ex-Blackfoot member Rickey Medlocke on lead guitar (he had briefly been in the band in 1977 as the second drummer and backing vocalist). It has now been released as a 2CD/DVD entity and is also available in a double LP format. The set-list will be well known to probably even the most casual of Skynyrd fans and contains all the classics.

Sonically, this is an excellent live recording with Johnny Van Zant's vocals and the guitars of Medlocke, original member Gary Rossington and Hughie Thomasson (The Outlaws) all sounding mean and lean. The visual recording is good without being awesome, as anyone who has ever attended a live show will well know. The second half of the performance is better and shows the band really enjoying themselves although the German crowd do come across as a little subdued at times.

The band hit the stage with the 'Workin' For MCA' and the synonymous Confederate Flag backdrop – this has now been contentiously removed from all their shows and website merchandise. 'I Ain't The One' continues the Southern Rock whilst 'Down South Jukin'' (misspelt on the CD case) shows the band's Country leanings. 'Double Trouble' puts the band back on full Southern Hard Rock mode and highlights the benefit of having the backing singers Dale Krantz-Rossington and Carol Chase. 'I Know A Little' and 'Swamp Music' sandwich the brilliant 'Saturday Night Special' that really shows how tight the nine members of Lynyrd Skynyrd were on that evening.

The poignant message in 'That Smell' is delivered with gusto but 'Simple Man' is arguably the pick of the songs, especially on the DVD in glorious Dolby Surround 5:1 (also available in stereo and DTS Digital Surround). The band can physically be seen to really enjoying themselves during the classic 'Gimme Three Steps' that features the four guitarists lined-up Scorpions style and there is a fantastic elongated version of the J.J. Cale standard 'Call Me The Breeze' that features solos from all three guitarists. Naturally, the set concludes with the classics 'Sweet Home Alabama' and 'Free Bird'.

Watch out the different hats that, the now sadly departed original member, Leon Wilkeson wears throughout the set.

The bonus features (CD/DVD set format only) will really appeal to diehard Skynyrd fans as it contains three classics, '...MCA', '...Bird' and '...Alabama' performed live at Hamburg Musikhalle on 5 December 1974 by the original line-up of Ronnie Van Zant (vocals), Rossington (guitars), Allen Collins (guitars, backing vocals), Ed King (guitars), Billy Powell (keyboards), Wilkeson (bass, backing vocals) and Bob Burns (drums).

The sound on the CD is, unsurprisingly, a little dated but substantially improved on the DVD version. The band looked incredibly young and it is difficult to watch without thinking of the tragedy that lay only three years later.

'Sweet Home Alabama' is another essential purchase for diehard fans of Lynyrd Skynyrd.

Mark Donnelly

MAX PIE – 'ODD MEMORIES' *(Mausoleum)* PROGRESSIVE

Founded in 2005 by vocalist Tony Carlino, Italian Prog Metallers Max Pie have steadily built up a following in European Metal circles and have returned to entertain everyone with their third album 'Odd Memories'. As was the case with their previous two albums, they have once more collaborated with producer Simone Mularoni (DGM) and his input has given this album a wide dynamic and forceful production that really suits this type of music.

When it comes to the music of MP, they play a type of Prog that has great technical flair running through it but this technicality is tempered by musicians who show they have a great feel for melody and harmony as well, which sadly is something many other Metal bands forget about when making albums these days.

One song worthy of mention is 'Odd Future' with its multi-layered guitars and keyboards that sweep and swerve throughout the songs melody, building to a potent climax during the eight minutes plus of this excellent Metal romp. Others include the Helloween-like 'Promised Land' where the dynamic keyboards of guest musician Julien Spreutels (Epysode, Ethernity) really help the song grow and come to life, the epic 'Love Hurts' where you can find the guitars of Damien Di Fresco dancing across the song's many levels with a stunning bell like tone, and 'Unchain Me' where Carlino's vocal's draw all the drama and energy they can from the track. Don't think however that MP are a one trick pony and can only play fast paced, grand sounding Prog Metal because when you check out the song 'Hold On' you'll find a band that can slow things down and write ballads full of emotion, great musicianship and strong melodies.

If I am honest, at the moment Prog Metal is a bit of an overcrowded marketplace and it takes something special for bands to stand out from the crowd. Max Pie have certainly done that on 'Odd Memories', filling their songs with powerful musicianship and what fans really clamour for, great songs. So if you are a fan of, or find enjoyment from, this particular genre then I suggest giving this album a try, I'm fairly confident you'll like what you hear.

Ian Johnson

METAL ALLEGIANCE – 'METAL ALLEGIANCE' *(Nuclear Blast)* HEAVY METAL

Metal Allegiance is the latest in a seeming growing line of "project collaboration" type bands. The Allegiance core is based around Dave Ellefson, Mike Portnoy and Alex Skolnick, who apart from their most well known associations with Megadeth, Dream Theater and Testament respectively, have a Metal pedigree across the genre that would be hard to surpass over the last thirty years. Combine this with a "Who's Who" of guest musicians and singers and the phrase "super-group" really doesn't do justice.

The album kicks off in brutal fashion with 'Gift Of Pain' featuring the screaming, guttural vocals of Lamb Of God's D. Randall Blythe over some classic riffing before the band launch into full-on Speed Metal shredding for the final two minutes or so of the song. Not being a fan of that particular style of vocal, 'Let Darkness Fall' provides a stronger sound to my taste whilst maintaining the Metal riffs. We have a definite Iron Maiden influence buried in the song, not least in the atmospheric, bass driven middle section with Troy Sanders from Mastodon providing the vocals sounding almost Ozzy Osbourne-like at times. There's plenty of variation without diluting the power on display here, 'Dying Song' has Phil Anselmo (Pantera) delivering an intense, haunting ballad before building into an impressive mid-tempo Rocker with Portnoy's drumming given a chance to shine.

Elsewhere 'Scars' sees Mark Osegueda (Death Angel) and Cristina Scabbia (Lacuna Coil) joining forces with vocal harmonies to compliment the guitar aggression, whilst Kings X bassist Doug Pinnick provides the melody to blend with the Metal bite of 'Wait Until Tomorrow'.

The album rounds off with the three-stage instrumental of 'Triangulum' and the final no holds barred Metal rage of 'Pledge Of Allegiance'. With guitar contributions from Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal (Guns 'N' Roses), Jamey Jasta (Hatebreed), and Sepultura's Andreas Kisser (amongst others), the quality never drops.

Whilst there are certainly parts of this album that reach and push my own taste in Metal speed and aggression, there's still no denying the quality of the artists on show in this genre and the writing ability of Portnoy Ellefson and Skolnick. All brought together by project mentor and leader Mark Menghi, the 'Metal Allegiance' may not be one for all our readers out there, but for the Metalheads amongst us, there's too much Metal to miss.

Ian Parry

MAGIC PIE – 'KING FOR A DAY' *(Karisma)* PROGRESSIVE

It's been too long since Magic Pie's last album ('The Suffering Joy' in 2011) with both a studio fire and a personnel change impacting progress; however, the good news is the wait has been more than worth it because this album is splendid. I'm sure anyone with a penchant for Prog, in all its guises, will relish the content. I listened to nothing else for two weeks and still keep returning to it.

With '...Joy' the band shifted their sound in a slightly heavier direction, adding some Spock's Beard style aggression to the previously more (The) Flower Kings orientated base. Evident on '...Day' is that they've injected even heavier elements, including Prog Metal à la Dream Theater, but importantly doing so without undermining their innate ability to produce the most wonderful melodies, themes, unforgettable choruses and refrains, all of which were what attracted me to the band in the first place.

The TFK, Neal Morse and SB comparisons persist but now the palette includes inflections of Transatlantic, the occasional quirkiness of 10CC and A.C.T along with some Derek Sherinian and Deep Purple-esque Hammond Organ, plus hints of Queensrÿche, Kamelot and the aforementioned DT. What they've managed to do, quite brilliantly, is meld classic Prog with both its modern variants and Hard Rock elements, thereby creating a superb collection of songs.

When I explain that the opening track, 'Trick Of The Trade', features almost all of these elements it may sound over-ambitious and a recipe for confusion but in reality it works in spectacular fashion with the song moving seamlessly between symphonic, prosaic and heavy sections without ever coming across as being disparate bits that have been haphazardly bolted together.

All six tracks are wonderful but special mention has to be made of the epic (in every sense) title track which clocks in at twenty-seven minutes (the others are between six and twelve minutes in duration). It encompasses everything that's good in the world of Prog with a lilting piano opening before guitars and synths burst in with an infectious theme. This wonderful instrumental fanfare is just the start as the song weaves its way through multiple different passages which flow into one and other without hesitation or giving the feeling of being contrived. It's a joyride and features any number of moments where the changes are executed so beautifully that I find myself smiling at the brilliance. The vocal harmonies are delightful throughout the album but especially so on this track. It rivals Transatlantic at their best.

2015 is shaping up to be a nightmare for choosing my "Top Five Albums Of The Year" as this is yet another candidate.

Gary Marshall

MIDWAY – 'KICKSTART RIOT' *(Rambo)* HARD ROCK

Sweden's still very much known as the one-stop shop for Rock but it does mean there's more dirt to dig through to find the gold. Midway have flashes of gold; take their quirky rhythms, unpredictable song-writing and general standard of playing. They are, however, only fleeting flashes.

I don't usually like intros but if they were all like this one I could get used to them. There's a bit too much of the Sci-Fi style creeping in and I prefer the guitar to the electronic sound effects but it could be far worse. Proper opener 'When I Was With You' combines punchy Hard Rock with almost Rap-like vocals. Listen carefully and you'll hear touches of AOR between chorus and verse. Vocalist Leaf isn't strong in the higher register but it's good to hear a bassist really playing around with rhythms and riffs in the background; it adds a Funky flavour to the album. There's not always much holding the songs together, as if the band is just jamming in introductions or bridges.

A big flash of gold arrives in the middle of the album in the shape of 'Come On Take Me'; backing vocals that sounded weak on other tracks suit the loose, wild mood of this song. 'Hey Ho' is charged with a relentless punching guitar and vocals curled into screams. Ballad 'She's Gone' is laced with some of the most powerful melodies on the whole album but the performance is less than perfect and a little rambling.

Midway does the whole hard-hitting riff well but it often feels like the songs run away from them and they lose control, as if they're trying to do much in one track. With this band, less could be more, especially when it comes to long solos. It's almost like guitarist Sam Cobra can't keep his hands still in the introduction to 'Cocaine' where he relentlessly wanders up and down the fret-board and it happens again during the verse. The chorus fails to pack a punch with more weak vocal melodies.

I almost feel like Midway would suit the stage more than the studio. The album is messy, rough and not always interesting, but the band have a pace, energy and an infectious quality that I think would blow a crowd away.

Sophie Brownlee

MOLTEN TRAIL – 'STRIVING FOR THE SKY' *(Defox/Heart Of Steel)* PROGRESSIVE

Let's call this Prog Metal. Or Prog Metal with a hint of Neo-Classical. Yes, there you go. Hmmm, not happy about that definition, well that is understandable as there's so much more here. Vytautas Diškevičius has worked with Classical Music, Rock and even written a

Eurovision entry – all that feeds into his labour of love debut 'Striving For The Skies' and it's a packed programme – sometimes too packed for its own good.

There are the banging, tight Prog Metal jabbing riffs and a bit of synth work, but there's also Spanish guitar, thin synth fanfares, Classically-influenced piano lines, Atari synths and musical theatre melodies.

As you can see, it's a heady brew and when it holds together, as it does on the opener 'Heaven Is Too Far', the results can be somewhat of a thrill-ride. If you've had your fill of anything, don't worry, something else will be along in a minute – see, a whole new section, oops... here comes a descending piano, very enjoya...hang on, here's pan pipe feeling, well, that's... whoa, just a minute, here's a guitar and synth duelling... let me just catch my breath...

Oddly, the eight tracks here are much more successful when they do dance around the main sound and throw in their own, although that's not to say that the chunky riffs and dense drums won't please a Prog Metal maven; 'Highway Ghost' not messing too much with the basics whilst closer 'Rise' is triumphant in its fanfare. For others, the jam-packed 'Let My Heart Go Down In Flames' has enough to satisfy even those internet savvy multi-taskers who, we are told by many in the mainstream press, have the attention span of a Paraguayan fruit fly; in fact, this track is approaching classy.

Big, clever and sometimes too precocious for its own good, this is an album which defies labels. It can take you to places you want to go or it can assault your senses to overload. 'Striving For The Sky'; sounds like it...

Steve Swift

MOSTLY AUTUMN – 'BOX OF TEARS' *(Mostly Autumn Records)* ROCK

Twelve months ago Mostly Autumn created the conceptual 'Dressed In Voices'. The work received critical acclaim and during the tour to promote its release, the band decided it deserved to be played in its entirety at every show and it acted as the second set highlight. 'Box Of Tears' (named after the final track on the album) is a live recording of 'Dressed....', though it is unclear from the sparse sleeve notes and accompanying promotional narrative whether the recording is taken from just one show or pieced together from a number. What is clear is just how much '...Tears' showcases MA's live persona.

I was fortunate enough to catch one of the shows in my home town during the 2014 tour and I cannot emphasise more strongly how well the material, as a whole, translates to the live environment. The music at each show was accompanied by projected images onto a large backdrop and though that has no influence here, the songs still resonate and impact in the same way. From the opening 'Saturday Night' through to the closing 'Box Of Tears' the emotion and passion never loses intensity.

Bryan Josh (guitar/vocals) and Olivia Sparnenn (vocals) are the obvious focal points of the band but everyone else's contributions cannot be underestimated as they are integral to the sound. The concept nature of 'Dressed...' means it is ultimately intended to be listened to as a whole but the songs have enough quality and distinction to allow them to be enjoyed individually.

Personal favourites include 'The House On The Hill', featuring a spellbinding vocal performance from Sparnenn, 'First Day At School' showcasing some intricate keyboard/piano work from Iain Jennings and 'Dressed In Voices' where Josh gets the chance to let rip with a fantastic solo. 'The Last Day' is the track that demonstrates how every aspect comes together at once and it would have been nice had it been extended a little. Everything is reproduced faithfully and one or two embellishments aside, I guess that is the only negative aspect. If this had been a visual package rather than just audio it may have had greater appeal.

Mostly Autumn fans should (and most likely will) take this release straight to heart and add it to their collection, almost like a souvenir of the show. But for those wishing to sample what this brilliant band are all about I think the studio version of 'Dressed...' is a better place to start.

Dave Bott

MELISSA ETHERIDGE – 'A LITTLE BIT OF ME: LIVE IN L.A.' *(SPV)* ROCK

Hot on the heels of the recent 'This Is M.E.' album and the resultant tour, comes this live CD/DVD release from two times Grammy and one time Oscar winner Melissa Etheridge.

Recorded at the Orpheum Theater (Los Angeles) on the '...M.E.' tour, the track listing features new tracks like 'I Won't Be Alone Tonight', 'Take My Number' and 'A Little Bit of Me' alongside "classics" and favourites like 'Bring Me Some Water', 'Come To My Window', 'I'm The Only One' and 'Like The Way I Do' (one of two DVD only tracks). Backing vocals on '...One' and 'Monster' (the second DVD only track) are provided by special guests Delta Rae.

With over twenty million album sales under her belt (and a star on the Hollywood Boulevard Walk Of Fame) Etheridge hardly needs comment and endorsement from me, but she's gonna get both though, as this live release is classy, well-performed and well-paced.

In some ways it's a game of two halves. Early track selections are distinctly tame – "accessible", if you prefer. On later tracks, however, most notably 'Meet Me In The Back', '...One' and '...Do', Etheridge and band cut loose and really go for it. '...Water' and a rather lengthy rendition of 'Monster' also kick out some serious Rock action (the former actually has Etheridge head-banging). Throughout, Etheridge's rasping and idiosyncratic vocals provide an edge and, even on more mainstream or Poppy material, signal clearly that she's for real.

It must also be said that the visual performance captured on the DVD really brings many of the tracks here to life. While Etheridge's introductions can sound quite affected on the audio only format, she comes across on the visual version as engaging and passionate – whether she's speaking, singing or playing guitar.

Bonus DVD features includes interviews with Etheridge, her band and her special guests, while the 'Backstage Pass' feature offers a behind the scenes look at the Orpheum performance.

All in all, this is an excellent audio/visual package that will excite existing fans and offer new listeners an interesting glimpse into the creative and performance world of Melissa Etheridge.

Michael Anthony

MY REFUGE – 'A MATTER OF SUPREMACY' *(Bakerteam)* PROGRESSIVE

Although not necessarily the first location you think when discussing places that have a rich and lengthy history in Heavy Metal music, Italy is bringing and delivering it to the masses in the form of My Refuge. In the five years since forming, this quintet have released two EPs and are now prepared to release their first full-length album with 'A Matter Of Supremacy'.

Surprisingly, the album does not comprise of all new material, as they have decided to mix new with old by combining six new tracks and four previously penned compositions. Since a bio on the band was not available, it is unclear as to whether the older material was simply culled from those previous sessions or was in fact re-recorded specifically for this album.

The music has all the earmarks consistent with the genre and each band member is very well versed on their respective instruments. Elements of Iron Maiden (harmonized guitars) and Helloween (fast-tempos) are prevalent throughout but the songs lack the character and memorable qualities that contemporaries have achieved. Although they do not stray into odd meters and shifting tempos, their unconventional song forms push MR into a more Progressive direction. Albeit unique, some may find themselves adjusting to Moz's vocal timbre.

His high tenor is strong and soaring yet also possesses a lamenting quality that brings to mind the melodramatic delivery of Robert Smith (The Cure). The majority of the songs feature melodies that keep Moz in a rather conservative pitch range but when required, he is able to confidently reach stratospheric pitches like on 'Endless Night' where his performance would make a young Geoff Tate blush.

Though My Refuge are quite studied, their brand of Power Metal is somewhat derivative for the genre and ultimately fails to set themselves apart from their peers. However, that is not to suggest that the album lacks personality. As a matter of fact, one of the strongest statements they make is on 'Somewhere', the album's concluding track.

Although not quite essential listening, fans of the style are encouraged to preview a few tracks and judge 'A Matter Of Supremacy' for themselves.

Brent Rusche

MYON – 'VITALWORKS' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Finnish five-piece Myon have been around for quite a while now, releasing their debut album in 1998 and following up at regular intervals with three others until seemingly giving up the ghost after 2007's 'Frameworks'. There's obviously some underlying frustration behind the press release for this album, which stresses several times that they have a growing fan base despite lack of support from their previous record labels. However, in merging Prog, Melodic Rock, Symphonic Metal and Contemporary Pop, I would suggest that the band must take some of the blame for trying to be all things to all men, falling between several stools and making marketing them very difficult indeed.

That the band are good musicians is without question, particularly keyboard player Mika Pohjola who provides most of 'Vitalworks' highlights, each song having nice instrumental bits and some truly majestic moments, but sadly, for me at least, that doesn't add up to a single song that's great all the way through. The main problem is vocalist Marco Mannermaa, who not only has an ordinary voice but gives the songs vocal melodies that don't always seem to fit the music.

Opener 'Otra Vez' is a case in point with its perfectly palatable Symphonic opening and melodic verse, nice Classical Guitar, superb electric guitar and synth solos, and then they go and ruin it with a poppy Eurovision chorus with Spanish lyrics. 'Twist In The Orbit' also has eighties Rush guitar sounds and a reasonable enough melody line, but Mannermaa sounds like he has a cold, whilst the jerky 'When It Could Begin' and 'Answer To It All' also channel Rush, particularly the latter's 'Subdivisions' keyboard chords.

It isn't all bad news however, 'Mystery Of The Moment' is a nice upbeat Rocker with an unnamed female guest vocalist, 'Blood Mountain' has some good ideas and the ballads 'In The Arms Of Eternity' and 'Silent Goodbye' are well executed, particularly the latter which is the simplest and best song on the album. I don't want to sound too dismissive because Myon have obviously put a lot of work into this album over a long eight year period, but sadly I've reviewed Myon albums before and enjoyed them more when they were a mix of just two styles.

Sometimes less is more. If you're interested you can buy the album at www.recordshopx.com/artist/myon/vitalworks/

Phil Ashcroft

NOX INTERNA – 'SPIRITUAL HAVOC' *(Echozone)* HARD ROCK

Think Gothic Metal, think The 69 Eyes, Type O Negative or HIM. Add in Billy Idol, Rob Zombie and Rammstein and you have Nox Interna. That this lot are part German is no surprise, that the other part is Spanish may well be.

From there, little in the way of shock arrives as the formula is strictly adhered to and presented most faithfully. That they do it well will only matter depending on how devoted to the Goth scene you are; for even though NI try hard to mix it at the top table, it's hard to suggest that we'll be sitting down to a banquet of 'Spiritual Havoc' anytime soon.

That said, NI know how to hammer out the boom-smash-boom-smash beats and threateningly Metalised atmospheres – throwing out some gargantuan choruses in the process. And yet despite 'Kill Yourself And Be Reborn' bringing the dark foreboding sound that this style thrives on and 'Parasites' offering up those chilling keyboards which have Zombified Rob again and again, little is raised above the status of "this is how our heroes do it".

Singer Ricky Nox does a decent job leading from the front and yet it's really only when he sings in his native Spanish, as he does on 'Agua De Vida' and 'El Ciclo', that he truly moves from cartoon villain to threatening horror terroriser; too often his band-mates also seemingly happy to merely go through the motions. A cover of 'Rebel Yell' by the ultimate lip-curer Idol only serves to confirm that Nox Interna are a good band with good ideas but little in the way of innovation or attitude.

To view them as anything other than followers in a genre where the leaders set the pace long ago, would be a stretch and in the end 'Spiritual Havoc' becomes much more Sunday service than it is black mass.

Steven Reid

MIKE TRAMP – 'NOMAD' *(Target)* — ROCK

'Nomad' is probably the most-fitting album title that Mike Tramp could have used when you think of how his career has seen him drifting from band to band and genre to genre, following various trends in search of musical fulfilment. And yet, it's a trait that has eternally worked for him as everything he's turned his hand to has always been successful, maybe not financially but definitely artistically. Even the White Lion "comeback" album 'Return Of The Pride' wasn't quite the disaster that many parties claimed it to be – and before anybody thinks of mentioning Vito Bratta, all I'll say is Whitesnake, House Of Lords, Foreigner... you get my point.

So 'Nomad' is the culmination of a trilogy of releases on his journey to show who he is and where he stands (in Tramp's own words) that began with the acoustic, Folk-orientated 'Cobblestone Street'. Its follow-up 'Museum' featured more instrumentation in terms of percussive elements and sound effects, while 'Nomad' sees Tramp and colleague Soren Andersen plugging in the guitars again and making the return to a full-band album, in effect making it probably the easiest of the trilogy to appreciate quickly. It doesn't quite "Rock" as hard as his WL, Freak Of Nature or even Rock 'N' Roll Circuz output, but has a softer Melodic Rock feel, more in line with his first solo release 'Capricorn' with the addition of a Country-tinged sound.

Tramp has always been someone with something to say – some would say opinionated – but some of his sentiments can often be misconstrued. However, dig deeper and there are some worthy words of advice to be found. Once again Tramp's story-telling lyrics are to the fore on 'Nomad', offering a revealing and reflective insight into his personal life while also offering notes of caution, and while the deeper tales encompass melancholic and sombre lyrics, the overall mood of the album is anything but, the simply wonderful melodies creating an enormously uplifting mood. Check out the likes of first single 'Give It All You Got', 'Wait Till Forever', 'Counting The Hours', 'High Like A Mountain' and 'Who Can You Believe' for proof, all destined to become future Tramp favourites, while the two ballad-ish numbers 'Live To Tell' and 'Moving On' close the album in a more pensive frame of mind; the latter one of the finest songs Tramp has recorded in his long career.

So 'Nomad' closes the trilogy in this chapter of Mike Tramp's life in fine style. Who know where his musical journey will take him next? One thing's for sure, I'll certainly be following him every step of the way.

Ant Heeks

OL DRAKE – 'OLD RAKE' *(Earache)* — INSTRUMENTAL

Having departed from the standard bearers of British Thrash (Evile), guitarist Ol Drake returns with a solo release that's sure to baffle many of his long term followers. Gone are the Metallic ear batterings of before and in their place comes an eclectic mix of guitar-shredding instrumentals. Aided by Fear Factory drummer Mike Heller, who puts in a towering shift, Drake sets about introducing this "about face" through the clumsily named 'Old Rake', where track titles such as 'Han Valen', 'Onions' and 'I'll Be Bach' (Get It?) give the impression that we've entered some sort of "comedy-shred" territory. In fairness there is a decent amount of levity in what's on offer, '...Rake' not being an album taking itself too seriously, and yet to underplay the talent and skill on show, even slightly, undermines what's being attempted.

As expected '...Valen' reminds of a certain Eddie Van Halen and yet there's also a strong whiff of David Lee Roth era Steve Vai, before 'Onions' hybrids Vai and Joe Satriani rather neatly. Already Drake's dexterity will have jaws scraping floors as frets blaze and solos sear, while 'Spaceship Janitor' turns the shred up to warp factor widdle. The latter is a pure Satriani-fest, played out at twice the speed and punctuated by "humorous" announcements, where the janitor of a spaceship is called to deal with all manner of mundane chores. In many ways this sums things up neatly, as well intentioned and superbly performed numbers slip frustratingly wide of the mark.

Interestingly the only tracks which really come close to a memorable breakthrough are the slower chime of 'Emperor' and atmospheric sweep of 'An Absence', although even here there's a feel of heard it all before. '...Bach...' offers a Neo-Symphonic slant and 'Karma' the smoothness its title suggests, before Gary Holt (Exodus/Slayer), Josh Middleton (Sylosis) and James Murphy (Testament/Death/Obituary) all make appearances on the impressive 'Guitarists Playing Guitars' thus providing an album highlight in the process.

On a release where the desired effect is nearly attained, but resolutely out of reach, there isn't a single substandard moment and yet the true standout sections are equally few and far between. Unfortunately that leaves 'Old Rake' as likely to leave Evile fans with their head in their hands as it will fret-followers a little underwhelmed.

Steven Reid

OPERATION: MINDCRIME – 'THE KEY' *(Frontiers)* — PROGRESSIVE

Putting aside the furore and court case surrounding singer Geoff Tate's departure from Queensryche and the respective releases from both versions of the band, the best way to approach this album is as a completely new and separate group, which of course it is. The addition of Disturbed/Adrenaline Mob bassist John Moyer and guitarist Scott Moughton (replacing the Sarzo brothers) alongside drummer Brian Tichy, keyboardist Randy Gane and guitarist Kelly Gray, has given them a much heavier sound, particularly Moyer whose contribution is huge throughout. It'll no doubt turn off a lot of the Queensryche faithful that Tate is further exploring the darker side of his writing, but some of his melodies can't really be disguised, no matter how you dress them up.

The first album in a trio of concept releases, 'The Key' is rife with 'Operation Mindcrime' style bits of dialogue and sound effects. The rhythm section – sometimes also including former AC/DC and Dio drummer Simon Wright alongside the omnipresent Moyer – is the focal point for a heavy and complex series of tunes with the occasional instrumental segue. The down-tuned guitars really suit the low-end thunder of tracks like 'Choices', 'Burn' and 'The Stranger', although they may be some of the less immediate songs to existing Tate fans despite the naggingly familiar vocal melodies, which unfortunately are largely without the man's upper register. The unusually raspy vocals of 'Life Or Death?' are a curve ball that passes me by and Tate almost talks his way through the dense instrumentation of 'Hearing Voices', but elsewhere things get a bit brighter and more melodic.

'Re-inventing The Future' is the closest thing to classic Queensryche that Tate's done in decades, whilst the ensuing 'Ready To Fly' is an inventive track, and one of several that has a tasteful synth solo. Similarly, 'On Queue' is lighter Prog with good melodies, a cool arrangement and a synth/sax trade-off, whilst the strident 'Kicking In The Door' is a good build-up to the epic closer 'The Fall'; all staccato riffs and overblown melodrama.

In context of Tate's past career, 'The Key' may seem like merely a step in the right direction, but as a new band it's certainly interesting enough to make me more than curious about what else is to come.

Phil Ashcroft

POINTS NORTH – 'POINTS NORTH' *(Magna Carta)* — INSTRUMENTAL

U.S. trio Points North are perhaps most notable for numbering ex-Whitesnake bassist Uriah Duffy in their ranks, but whilst there seems to be a glut of guitar instrumentalists around at the moment, PN are definitely a band rather than a guitarist with backing musicians. Guitarist Eric Barnett and drummer Kevin Aiello complete the line-up, this self-titled album being the follow-up to the 2012 'Road Less Traveled' release, also on the Pete Morticelli's Progressive Magna Carta label.

What sets PN apart from many of their contemporaries is the strength of their song-writing, which is credited to all three members and concentrates more on catchy, succinct tunes and tight arrangements, although each member is quite capable of shredding with the best of them when required. Joe Satriani, Jeff Beck and Steve Vai are obvious reference points, but more band-oriented compositions also bring Rush, Dixie Dregs and even The Police into the equation.

'Northstar' and 'Killer Pounder', for instance, are straight-ahead Rockers with superb melodies that are simple enough to have a wide appeal, but are still high on virtuosity. 'Ignition' is tuneful and Progressive with fluid guitar and a short bass showcase, the beautiful 'Child's Play' hints at Satriani with its great guitar tone, whilst the more aggressive 'Sky Punch' and the killer 'Foxes & Cougars' are very DD-like in structure, particular the latter with its great guitar/bass trade-off.

There's a bit of variety on show with the seventies Rocker 'Colorblind' even having vocal parts – I assume from Duffy, although it isn't specified – and the superb, acoustic-based 'Harlequin' has nice piano parts from guest David Earl, but it probably comes as no surprise that my favourite song is the homage to Rush entitled 'Turning Point (La Villa De Villers)', a reference to both 'La Villa Strangiato' (check out the similar melodic passage in the middle) and executive producer/engineer Dave De Villers.

It's great to see the name of my old friend Danny Danzi attributed to mixing and mastering, his work alongside producer Eric Barnett giving the album a rich, clear texture that's sorely lacking from a lot of its ilk.

Suffice to say that after the first play of Point's North self-titled sophomore release, I immediately went online to buy their excellent debut.

Phil Ashcroft

PRAYING MANTIS – 'LEGACY' *(Frontiers)* — HARD ROCK

Like a lot of the bands that were swept along by the groundswell of the euphoria that surrounded the burgeoning NWOBHM at the dawn of the 1980s, Praying Mantis didn't exactly fit the standard business model or paradigm. They were far too melodic and accomplished for starters (and yes, that's most definitely meant as a compliment!), their svelte melodies and comparatively catchy tunes a far cry from the perennial pub bands who provided the soundtrack to oblivion most weekends.

In many respects, it's a shame that they didn't follow the likes of Iron Maiden and Def Leppard onto a bigger world stage as I've always felt their music deserved a much more expansive audience. But hey, what else could you expect from an intrinsically corrupt industry run by muppets at the whim of bean counters with no musical soul?

It's been a good six years since the last PM album emerged – 2009's excellent 'Sanctuary' – and whilst the core of the band (the Troy brothers & Andy Burgess) is still going strong, latest release 'Legacy' sees a couple of changes in the band's line-up ... with "new" vocalist John "Jaycee" Cuijpers and drummer Hans In 'T Zandt making their debut. Quite what drives a band that's been active for more than forty years (particularly one that hasn't had the trappings of success some of their contemporaries have enjoyed) is a debatable point, but whatever it is, Chris and Tino Troy seem appear to have large reserves of it stashed away somewhere!

Boasting another stunning piece of Rodney Matthews' artwork (this guy has long been my favourite artist), 'Legacy' sees Praying Mantis once again deliver their own unique brand of fire and brimstone wrapped in a velvet glove. Whether it's the influx of new blood into their ranks that has given them added impetus or not is open to question, but there's something of a renewed sense of purpose permeating throughout the digital grooves of 'Legacy'. The melodies seem brighter, the passion burns stronger and the melodramatic ebb and flow seems more natural than it has for years.

In amongst anthemic crowd pleasers like 'The Runner', the pompous 'Fight For Your Honour' (cracking choice of opener guys!) and 'Against The World', you'll find plenty of equally engaging moody numbers like 'The One', 'All I See' and 'Eyes Of A Child' as well as smouldering ballads such as 'Better Man'.

If this is the soundtrack of a band undergoing a mini renaissance, then count me in!

Dave Cockett

ROYAL QUEST – 'THE TALE OF MAN' *(Independent)* — SYMPHONIC METAL

Pretty much the brainchild of one Yannis Androulakakis from Athens, Greece – a composer, arranger and classically-trained musician whose services seem quite in demand in theatre as well as Jazz and Soundtrack-based music – Androulakakis originally formed Royal Quest alongside bassist Dennis Bekatoros back in 1998 and their first demo saw the light of day the following year. Inspired by the tales of 'The Eternal Champion' – a character that features in multiple novels across the board by Michael Moorcock – an epic fantasy Metal opera was conceived by the two musicians. But after many years of playing around with the concept and false starts, and also having enlisted Odysseas (potentially nicknamed after an ancient Greek hero) to play drums, Bekatoros bailed.

And it was probably just as well. Starting from scratch around five years ago

Androulakakis has built up an overly ambitious project with himself handling all the guitars and programming and utilising three separate vocalists and a violinist. The end result is a messy, convoluted yet original mini Metal Opera that had great potential but is ultimately unsatisfying.

The four main protagonists are Androulakakis himself as the "Lord Of Chaos", Vasilis Axiotis as "Man", Angeliki Frangos as "Cassandra" and the curiously named Basil as "Lord Of Law". Of course chaos and law are part of the struggle for the Eternal Champion in Moorcock's novels and Androulakakis might have been better served doing a Fantasy Opera that's based on Elric Of Melnibone which would at least have been a more familiar tale for fans given Metal music and fantasy literature tend to overlap on many levels amongst people.

If the music was first rate most fans would overlook the concept and lyrical ideas but even though the original players (including violinist Kalliopi Mitropoulou) are very good musicians and singers, the structure and pacing are clumsy and over dramatic in places.

'The Reign Of Law' is one such piece where Frangos' lyrics sound very forced and don't fit the musical timing whilst 'Dark Lord's Words' seems to have so many musical ideas planned for it that it descends into a very dramatic mess of guitars, drums and Classical overlay. The drumming overall is fabulous but you have to wonder whether it's very clever programming by Androulakakis or were Odysseas' parts kept from earlier? Or did Androulakakis utilise the talents of Mirkko DeMaio who's involved in the Vivaldi Metal Project that Androulakakis is involved in as an arranger. For my part, as no drummer is listed, I'm sticking to a human drummer as there are too many fills and broken up beats for it not to be so.

The mixing by acclaimed Mika Jussila is as you would expect, but overall this is very disappointing.

Carl Buxton

SACRILEGE – 'SIX6SIX' *(Pure Steel)* HEAVY METAL

The story of Sacrilege began in 1982, when singer and guitarist Bill Beadle formed the band. With record label interest and a possible Iron Maiden support slot, all looked promising for the band. But misfortune struck when the drummer injured his hand and they lost that opportunity.

Nevertheless, an album called 'Gates Of Hell' was put together, albeit in demo form only. Beadle kept the band going until 1987 whereupon he walked away from the music scene to start a family.

After various line-up changes a consistent group emerged comprising of Beadle on vocals and guitar, Neil Turnbull (ex-Dervish) on drums, Tony Vanner on lead and Jeff Rolland on bass and backing vocals. In the space of two months they have quickly made up for lost time, recently releasing the compilation 'Ashes To Ashes' (which provides an outline from the early 1980s to the present day) and now a brand new album entitled 'Six6Six'.

Keeping the influence of NWOBHM but with a modern shine to the music has served the band well. The opening guitar riff of 'Welcome To The Dragons Den' takes us back to a more simple style of Dark Rock, the type that Witchfynde and Demon made a name with. The music is unpretentious and honest which is refreshing.

'Lucifer's Soldiers' has a sinister sneer among the old-school Metal traits, the riffs are slow and moody, and the droning vocals bring to mind the band Candlemass. 'In Hell' is a little to close to the song 'Black Sabbath' in structure for my liking. Fortunately 'Sanctuary' supplies a penetrating guitar and a climatic chorus, while 'Forever After' delivers some old-school Doom Rock.

Hopefully Sacrilege will get some of the acclaim with this release having missed out on first time.

Ray Paul

SAGA – 'BEST OF: NOW AND THEN – THE COLLECTION' *(earMUSIC)* PROGRESSIVE

For those that still haven't discovered four decades of Saga music, there are literally dozens of compilations on the market, although this one is a little bit different in that it contains just one track from each of their twenty-one studio albums thus far. A double album that thankfully doesn't shy away from some of their lengthier tracks, the fact that it has to gel together means that not all the tracks are the highlight of their particular album.

The Canadian icons have carved out a niche for themselves with epic Pomp tracks and catchy Prog/Pop, but two discs of those might be a little too much, so inclusions like the Jim Gilmour ballad 'Scratching The Surface', the acoustic title-track from 'The Security Of Illusion' and 'Marathon's 'Breathing Lessons' are there as a respite from Ian Crichton's incendiary riffs, Steve Negus' thundering percussion and Gilmour's and singer Michael Sadler's inventive synths.

There are very few substandard albums in the Saga catalogue, so 'The Perfectionist' from 1978's debut album, the following year's 'You're Not Alone', the epic 'Don't Be Late' and evergreen 'On The Loose' are just some of the songs that still feature in the live set today. After the catchy 'Take A Chance', the Poppy AOR of 'Wildest Dreams' and the brilliant 'Giant', the first disc only goes slightly wrong on one song, the simplistic Peter Gabriel-esque 'Steamroller' from the TV pilot soundtrack 'Steel Umbrellas'.

The second disc starts with excerpts from two of their more controversial records, the instrumental title-track from the deep 'Generation 13' and the most traditional song from the much-maligned and dark 'Pleasure & The Pain' album; 'Heaven Can Wait'. From 1999 onwards Saga seemed to get their second wind, with a stream of consistently good albums that spawned the likes of the powerful 'The One', the tuneful 'Always There' and the wonderful 'On The Air'. The title track from 'Trust' is deceptively simple and 'Book Of Lies' and 'Anywhere You Wanna Go' have all the distinctive stellar musicianship and Sadler's resonant voice to almost match the material from their first six classics. Oddly even the Rob Moratti-fronted 'Step Inside' sounds like classic Saga in this context, the band bringing things up to date with the cleverly arranged 'I'll Be' from last year's 'Sagacity' opus.

As compilations go this is a particularly good one and would work as a taster to the band, but for a band with a legacy as good as Saga's, this is merely scratching the surface.

Phil Ashcroft

SCREAMING EAGLES – 'STAND UP AND BE COUNTED' *(Off Yer Rocka)* HARD ROCK

Back in 2013 I had no hesitation in proclaiming that Northern Ireland's Screaming Eagles had announced themselves on the Rock world with one of the debut albums of that year. Two years down the line and that stunningly strong introduction has been built upon with the fantastic 'Stand Up And Be Counted', an album that will prove to be one of the home-grown albums of this year. So what exactly is it about this bunch that has me, for a second time, all a-froth? Well with the band taking their AC/DC framework and kicking it squarely up the arse with a smack of prime-time Black 'N' Blue, the heavy end of Kiss and a touch of fired-up Blackberry Smoke, what's not to get excited about?

Guitarist Adrian McAleenan is a star in the making, his solos fiery and riffs threatening, yet there are no histrionics on show. Instead the song comes first every time and with bassist Ryan Lilly and drummer Kyle Cruickshank matching him every step of the way, the effect is towering. Likewise vocalist Chris Fry hits the mark time and again, his throaty rush of power everything you could wish for from a front-man; attitude ably backed up by a hugely convincing delivery. As with all the best gang-leaders, it's hard to rip your attention from his charismatic, youthful Phil Mogg-like attack and yet not for a second does he upstage the rip-roaring riffs that rampage throughout the opening sprint of 'Ready For The Fall', deserved strut of 'Get Out While I'm Ahead', or AC/DC on steroids of 'Screaming Eagles'. That the down and dirty Boogie of 'Save Me', the swagger of 'Bow Down To The Blues' and the rumbling roll of 'Breakin' All The Rules' all find an outfit willing, and more importantly able, to alter their attack without losing an inch of their impact and thus showing maturity way beyond this band's years.

We may have gone through some lean times in the U.K.'s Classic Rock scene, yet with the likes of BlackWolf, Bad Touch and The King Lot also making waves, a serious resurgence is on the cards. Screaming Eagles will be right at the forefront of that movement, as they prove proud enough and brave enough to 'Stand Up And Be Counted'. Will you?

Steven Reid

MOTÖRHEAD – 'BAD MAGIC' *(UDR)* HEAVY METAL

What kind of introductory vignette can be written about the band that's an encyclopaedic definition of a "Rock legend" – their sound being an embodiment of Rock 'n' Roll in its most simple, raw, straight "in your face" form? And what can you say about Lemmy Kilmister that hasn't been said before? While some of our younger selves likely etched Motörhead's logo into our school desks (and some maybe didn't), the band's legendary status is undeniable for anyone who has at least a tad of Rock 'n' Roll in their bloodstream. And it's certain Motörhead's new album 'Bad Magic' won't really change this status quo.

This album has (as would be expected) an entirely raucous, loud, brash Rock 'n' Roll sound that is embroidered with gritty vocals that are driven along by a pulse-pounding drum line and raw guitars. And, of course, Kilmister's characteristic, hoarse voice was never about his range as much as it was about the trademark addition to Motörhead's sound. From the opening track 'Victory Or Die' and its fierce follow-up 'Thunder And Lightning' to the rough, Punk-ish vibe of 'Electricity' and the sinister Black Sabbath-esque undertones of 'Evil Eye', '...Magic' is pure Metal magic indeed.

What about the potential highlights? Could it be the heavy, lumbering 'The Devil' which is seasoned with a guest solo by the mighty Brian May of Queen? Maybe it is the wonderfully imperfect vocally, but heart-tugging and honest ballad 'Till The End'? Or is it Kilminster and the gang doing a gritty, guitar-laden version of The Rolling Stones' classic 'Sympathy For The Devil' that marks the album's strong point? As one song after another of '... Magic' plays, it gets increasingly difficult to pick just one or two highlights from many.

There are many classic bands now busy with reinventing the proverbial wheel, album after album – as well as those who fooled themselves into thinking that a drastic, stylistic volte-face is exactly what their fans are waiting for. 'Bad Magic' represents superb and unquestionable proof that Motörhead belongs to neither of these camps. Their twenty-second studio release runs counter to whatever is "current" in modern Metal, instead utilizing all the flavours rooted deeply in the band's style.

Love them or loathe them, it's simply classic Motörhead – into the fortieth year of the band's history and still going unbelievably strong.

Alexandra Mrozowska

SEEK IRONY – 'TECH 'N' ROLL' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

After playing the debut Seek Irony album I found myself searching for a new musical genre (still within the Rock spectrum of course) and finally settled on Rave Rock, though Techno Metal was also in the running at one point. This new five-piece originate from Tel Aviv but in recent years have re-located to Austin, Texas. On 'Tech 'N' Roll' they have taken a Modern Rock blueprint and tweaked it to create a style of their own, with each song being embellished by a computerised Industrial undercurrent that never proves to be overbearing but more of an enhancement to the overall sound.

As soon as opening track 'She' came blasting through the speakers I knew I was listening to something I would like. Every song on 'Tech...' has energy to burn and it is left to the moody atmospherics of closing 'Head Above The Water' to fly the "ballad" flag. 'When You Lie' and 'Low' (great mid-song breakdown) are Electric Boys Funky and the programmed loops and samples along with the scratching add dynamic elements to the music without detracting from the highly commercial melodies.

If arranged slightly differently 'Devil In Me' and 'Skin 2 Skin' would be chart-worthy and, even in its current state, the structure and tempo of 'Running Towards The Edge Of The World' is pure Pop with a hint of aggression. Once or twice I was reminded of the Sunshine Jive (anyone remember them?) album from 1999 and though there is a hint of quirkiness surrounding one or two tracks (and this approach may be a bit distracting for some) I found it to be refreshingly infectious. 'Rave-O-lution' and 'Tragically Driven' blend The Prodigy style Dance phrases with crunching riffs to great effect and manage to sound original even though references prove unavoidable.

Kfir Gov (vocals), Rom Gov (drums), Alex "Sasha" Campbell (guitar), Adam Donovan (bass) and Mikael Oganes (piano, keys, DJ) have created something, though essentially Rock music, that is different and veers ever so slightly from the norm. I know I love it.

Dave Bott

SIDEBURN – 'EVIL OR DIVINE' *(Metalville)* HEAVY METAL

Not to be confused with the similarly named Southern Boogie merchants from Switzerland, Sweden's Sideburn operate in a much more riff driven, Stoner/Doom Metal-oriented field but without losing sight of melody. Dating back to the late 1990s, 'Evil Or Divine' is their fifth full album to date, a much anticipated (by some of us at any rate) follow-up to 2012's largely well received 'IV Monument' opus. Of the seven songs that make up this release, all but two clock in at well over six minutes with the epic 'The Day The Sun Died' cruising past the eight minute mark… but hey, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Put together by guitarist Morgan Zocek around 1998, Sideburn had a fairly long gestation period, their debut 'Trying To Burn The Sun' eventually emerged in 2002. Over the years they've had a couple of line-up tweaks, the most notable being the addition of vocalist Dimitri Keiski who replaced original front-man Jani Kataja a couple of years ago. Although at the time of their formation Stoner bands such as Kyuss and Fu Manchu featured heavily in their diet, when you strip it back to basics their sound is heavily influenced by the holy triumvirate (Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin) as well as Michael Schenker, Dio, Soundgarden and Spiritual Beggars.

Dominated by the gloomy, behemoth-like riffs of Zocek and bassist Martin Karlsson, album opener 'Masters And Slaves' has a remorseless, rumbling intensity that just reeks of classic Sabbath with a bit of a Rush infusion… nice old-school soloing too! Following cut 'Sea Of Sins' ups the pace a little, the Neo-Classical undercurrent and twisted Eastern influences projecting a dark, prime time Rainbow vision onto the ubiquitous Sabbath vibe; the more I listen to it the more I get a weird 'Stargazer' flashback! Again Zocek puts together a very well structured solo which anchors him firmly in Tony Iommi, Ritchie Blackmore and Jimmy Page territory.

Elsewhere, 'When Darkness Calls' throws a dollop of Zep into the melting pot (although on first listen the track "borrows" liberally from the Iommi songbook – think 'Black Sabbath'), 'The Seer (Angel Of Death)' has a solid, mid-paced groove, 'Evil Ways' ups the ante even further and has a great blistering solo in the middle whilst sprawling final cut 'Presence' is real conundrum of moods. Standout cut for me though is the aforementioned epic '…Died', a real master-class in Doom intensity with a Progressive flow that melds Sabbath, Dream Theater and Soundgarden into one gloriously hedonistic riff fest.

I wouldn't quite put them in the Sorcerer or Candlemass class just yet, but in the growing pantheon of Doom Metal bands emerging from the Swedish scene, Sideburn are definitely well above average.

Dave Cockett

SKIN & BONE – 'REVENGE' *(Hot Box)* HARD ROCK

'Revenge' is the debut album from British Hard Rockers Skin & Bone and this one has been a long time coming. I've been following these guys for some time, watching and listening to their progress, but it has felt like this album has taken a lifetime to come out! These guys have taken their time getting this recorded and produced to the standard they wanted and producer Jay Parmar has done a great job proving, even with limited budgets, that a quality production can be achieved. I wasn't shocked to learn that their follow-up album is already mostly written and just needs recording and releasing – I wonder how long they'll make us wait for that!

When I saw the band live a few years ago I would have described them as a bare bones Classic Rock outfit, the album though is a little bit different to what I was expecting. It has turned out to be far heavier with the Modern touches far more prominent in the overall sound of the album. 'Revenge' is quite an apt album title as the album is very dark, forceful and, at times, aggressive. The overall feel of the album really makes me think this release will appeal to those who love the current American Modern Rock scene along the lines of Shinedown. That's not to say this album is a one trick pony; the styles and influences are quite varied (although the dark nature of the album sometimes overshadows them) and there are Classic Rock grooves, a few melodic harmonies and even some NWOBHM.

For me, vocalist Johnny Trowbridge's style helps make the songs stand out, occasionally melodic but, given the more forceful nature of this album, strong and punchy when a chorus needs to smack you in the face and his style is able to deliver that without going into the growling style that is so prominent in today's Rock and Metal. Guitarist Richie Beardsley's contributions are extremely varied given the melting pot of styles on display which allows him to flex his guitar skills to the max and interestingly even swooping in with some Van Halen-inspired guitar riffage at times; check out 'Like A River' for a prime example of this.

One of the real stand out tracks for me is 'The Healer' as this really highlights what the band are trying to achieve all in one song; the mix of styles, darkness and aggression creates a memorable song that sticks in your head. 'Revenge' on the whole is a very strong album and if you're looking for some powerful, driven Hard Rock then this is an album well worth your time checking out.

Paul Woodward

SKINTRADE – 'SCARRED FOR LIFE' *(AOR Heaven)* HARD ROCK

Having originally hailed from the MTV 'Headbangers Ball' era rather than modern day YouTube and painstaking count of Facebook shares/likes period, Skintrade are back and trying to secure themselves a steady place among the Modern Rock acts. 'Scarred For Life' – the group's new album released via AOR Heaven – is the best proof that even though these Swedes have no regrets about their past, they seldom look back.

The album starts with the title track, which is driven with a riff that pretty much says it all. Loud, raw and modern; it's the same sound and formula that the reborn Skintrade had already introduced us to on last year's 'Refueled'. Most of the songs on the latest album are up-tempo, Modern Hard Rock pieces built around heavy guitar licks contrasted with relatively melodic and catchy choruses ('Goodbye', 'Lay With Me', 'LoveHate').

Far from reinventing a proverbial wheel, the Swedish Rockers are predictable but certainly powerful as evidenced in the groovy, Funk Rock-tinged 'Leave A Scar' as well as getting more aggressive in 'Storm Will Come' and '15 Minutes Gone'. However, there are also moments of slowdown – for the sake of diversity at least. The first appears in the shape of the sombre ballad 'Find A Way' – an emotional outpouring delivered by Matti Alfonzetti against a heavy, lumbering instrumental background and enriched with a nifty guitar solo. 'Broken' is not exactly ballad-ish but a melodic mid-tempo offering with a certain "radio hit" potential. Covering Katy Perry's 2012 single 'Wide Awake' might have seemed a weird choice at first, but it fits the rest of the material lyric-wise and the song's empowering message gets stronger while the musical side of the track has been deprived of the sugary "radio-friendliness" of its original version.

If one had to describe 'Scarred For Life' with just one word, "powerhouse" is the one that would, without doubt, do the trick. And, similarly to their previous post-hiatus effort 'Refueled', it's no nostalgia-driven trip either. The unabashed energy of their debut album and the early 1990's Rock flavour – raw, stripped-down and straightforward – are present here and there, but the overall sound and production definitely belong to the contemporary era.

Skintrade's new effort is therefore a well-crafted, solid record that is 2015 all over – or (depending on your personal viewpoint) as far as the band's front-man Alfonzetti could have likely distanced himself from his Bam Bam Boys and Jagged Edge era.

Alexandra Mrozowska

SLASH FEATURING MYLES KENNEDY & THE CONSPIRATORS – 'LIVE AT THE ROXY 25.9.14' *(Armoury/Universal – Eagle/Universal)* HARD ROCK

You can't help but think that if the most famous top-hat in music had realised his touring band for the 'Slash' record was going to become a permanent feature, he'd have called them something a little less unwieldy than Slash Featuring Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators. Unbelievably, what has gone on to become a genuine band that celebrated their fifth anniversary on the 25th of September last year and to mark the occasion they returned to the scene of their first show, The Roxy in Hollywood.

Fittingly for such a small venue, the sound is kept true and claustrophobic on this double CD set, Kennedy's voice not touched up and the guitars pleasingly gritty, while the small crowd are loud in the mix, but not obtrusive. As you'd expect with this no nonsense superstar, the need for big intros is dispensed with, the chiming guitar line of 'Ghost' kicking in the second you hit play. It's a great track and one which finds the band in full flow, Alter Bridge front-man Kennedy authoritative from the off, while the rhythm section of Todd "Dammit" Kerns on bass and Brent Fitz on drums provide a mighty rumble of power from which the likes of 'Stone Blind' and 'You're A Lie' positively thrive.

Performed as much because he enjoys playing them than because the fans demand them, the Guns 'N' Roses classics are also in strong evidence, Kennedy bringing his own personality to 'Nightrain' and 'You Could Be Mine', while Kerns shows his singing skills on 'You're Crazy', as he does on Slash's 'Doctor Alibi'; his Punky delivery perfect on both. However Slash is the man and, backed by on stage rhythm guitarist Frank Sidoris, he takes the opportunity to show his flicks, tricks and licks throughout, really letting loose with a lengthy solo during 'Rocket Queen'. Although with the song stretched out to over seventeen minutes, the dazzling effect does wear off after the first couple of spins.

After that workout, the classy mid-paced numbers 'Bent To Fly' and 'Starlight' reset the focus, although it's the rush for home of the Slash cuts 'World On Fire' and 'Anastasia', Velvet Revolver highlight 'Slither' and GNR pair of 'Sweet Child O' Mine' and 'Paradise City' which truly remind us of just how pivotal Slash has been to the Rock world over the past couple of decades.

Unusually and a little disappointingly, the separately available single DVD release of this anniversary show features two less tracks than the audio edition; the pair omitted being the excellent 'Halo' and 'Doctor Alibi'. With Kerns and not Kennedy handling live vocal duties for the latter of those two, it possibly explains for continuity reasons, why we have a "bonus"

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POWERPLAY –'ALL THOSE YEARS' *(Target)* — MELODIC ROCK

Now, if you are into finely matured AOR and Melodic Rock – the type that, as it ages, reveals fully defined textures and wide bouquets that are more robust with an acute potency – then PowerPlay is all you really need! 'All Those Years' is the group's much anticipated and, for some, long awaited debut album! An album that we could rightly and honestly say has taken twenty years to make.

Hailing from Copenhagen, and formed in 1987, PowerPlay are five veteran musicians that write and play with passion. Still in its original form, PowerPlay in 2015 is also still as potent – and just possibly even more so – as they were in the late eighties and early nineties. The group were just starting to make an impact on the European Rock scene back then and are set to do so again now! They would perform whenever and wherever possible and grew a reputation for stellar performances and top-drawer musicianship – forging a unique sound in the true West Coast style of music. Although many years have since come and gone, this freshness, passion and excellent musicianship is still very much evident!

Now, once again, the group are ready to share and deliver all of the above to the rest of the world with (and indeed after) '...Years'. When listening, one will hear a freshness and quick tempos that actually belie the age of PowerPlay! These five create flowing salutations of life, love and redemption set to finely textured, musical undercurrents. Undercurrents that contain Progressive leanings, some Jazz and razor sharp movements all enveloped in sweet melodies; 'Cry Freedom' displays a little of their edginess while 'Bad Bone' shows their expertise in the power ballad. A multi-talented band with many sides to their musical identity, PowerPlay consistently display a keen sense of melodic pureness. Big on melody and harmonies, the soundscapes on '...Years' are moody, melodic, smoky and above all; it is absolute sonic ear candy!

Is that West Coast style of music still alive? It certainly is, aided by the sheer calibre of these five musicians. Although it may have taken them twenty years or more to let us in on their musical secret, they will hopefully be delighting us well into the future!

PowerPlay and 'All Those Years' is a debut with enough depth to give us thrills for many more years to come!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

section where his version of '...Crazy' can be found. Although why '...Blind', 'Wicked Stone' and '30 Years To Life' couldn't be simply slotted into their correct positions in the set, I've no idea. As before, the gritty sound retains an honest and true feel which adds hugely to the "wish you were there" factor.

Never the most natural of front-men, Kennedy makes up for it through a stunning vocal display and his obvious passion for the songs he sings, while Slash himself proves (as if he needed to) yet again, what a fantastic guitarist he is (even if my lack of excitement at his extended solo during '...Queen' stands for the DVD, as it does the CD). However the crowd don't seem as manic as they should at having the opportunity to witness five genuine Rock stars in intimate surrounds and when added to the shot happy direction from Derek Manning and Bart Peters, it can be hard to truly engage with the performances on the DVD version.

One of the most celebrated musician Hard Rock has ever produced, Slash has earned that tag by writing and performing songs that have gone on to shape the music we all listen to. Gather them together and perform them with a band on top form and 'Live At The Roxy 25.9.14' is the result. Quite spectacular it is too, especially on the CD.

Steven Reid

SOLDIER – 'DEFIANT' *(Independent)* — HEAVY METAL

I'm not sure if Soldier knows that 1982 has come and gone! Their sound and style is right out of the dawn of the NWOBHM movement and their new album 'Defiant' sounds like it's just got sucked through a time vortex and spat out into 2015! The bands heavily traditional sound is no surprise given that their history dates right back to 1979 and following a resurgence of interest and popularity in recent times, have been wining new fans with their latest albums.

'Defiant' is wall to wall old-school NWOBHM which is highly melodic and rubs shoulders with the likes of Iron Maiden, Tygers Of Pan Tang and Praying Mantis. If I'm honest the album feels a little dated to me and it does affect my opinion of the album slightly, it's a good album, not groundbreaking but enjoyable. Had this been a re-issue I would have been less critical and would reflect on the album with warm nostalgia and that sense of retro would have irked me less.

Now don't get me wrong there is some quality stuff here and I'm certain NWOBHM traditionalists will be flipping the bird at this very page right now in total disagreement! Traditional sounding NWOBHM is still insanely popular, especially on the continent, and the leather and denim crew are recruiting new members regularly and that audience will love this album, I am sure.

I think the thing that appeals to me the most is the fact the album is highly melodic in every aspect and I'm particularly fond of the vocals which cast an extra layer of melody over every song. Vocalist Richard Frost has a really smooth vocal unlike some of the screamers and shouters you sometimes associate with some of the heavier bands of this genre.

To me Soldier sway more towards the softer melodic side of the genre; that doesn't distract from the energy and pumping rhythms but that extra melody, does seem to soften the overall impact. Personally given my own tastes this is an awesome thing but it's not too soft and Metal fans should still be able to sink their teeth into a good old air guitar and hair windmill frenzy!

The closing track 'Don't Come Crying To Me (Defiant)' is a particular highlight, I really like its swagger and the way the song builds to an anthemic, fist-punching chorus which I'm sure genre fans will enjoy alongside those epic melodic guitar riffs ala Maiden displayed throughout the album!

'Defiant' is full of epic guitar riffs and galloping rhythms which should have NWOBHM fans setting the dandruff free and fist-pumping along to every chorus. Highly recommended for NWOBHM traditionalists!

Paul Woodward

SOVEREIGN COUNCIL – 'LANIAKEA' *(Independent)* — SYMPHONIC METAL

Here's living proof that shows that Female-Fronted Symphonic Rock/Metal isn't an exclusive domain and does reach beyond the boundaries of the Netherlands and mainland Europe. Formed in 2012, Sovereign Council, from Kingston, Ontario have opted for the "dual singer" approach and offer up a combination of male and female vocals to spearhead the band. The question is, how have they developed since their debut album ('New Reign') which saw them nudging their way towards the front of the Canadian Rock and Metal scene?

Having joined SC to accompany Alexander MacWilliam as second lead vocalist (with the challenge of never having sung in a Metal band before) is Lisa Thompson who will be the one fans will be checking out to see how she shapes up on her second album. Her position isn't so much as an out and out front-woman but instead sitting comfortably alongside, and in tandem, with MacWilliam. This was a clever move initially designed to ease her into the band and not overexpose her lack of experience, but now sees her taking a greater role than on the debut. And the combination, with the options it gives on the vocal side, works really well.

The Euro Symphonic Rock connection is strengthened with Delain's Timo Somers pitching in with a trademark solo on the single 'The Human Condition', while the album also features Brazilian-based violinist Marina Andrade. Known for her work with Santanarium, she provides violins most notably on 'Polaris' and the piano-led intro to 'Morta' – probably the most Operatic sounding piece on the record switching between the two voices as the guitars punctuate the hypnotic piano rhythm.

It's an arrangement which crops up regularly; 'Nona' follows in a similar vein with a gentle piano showcasing Thompson, before the contrast of the darker vocals and thunderous drums and guitar. The songs do appear on the shorter side so they don't hang around and outstay their welcome – all compact and concise and it would be interesting to see if Sovereign Council have the confidence to progress into some more ambitious compositions. Not that longer is better of course, but they show the potential to shift moods and gears, with these songs essentially ticking the standard dark vocal/soft vocal/thundering bass drum/gargantuan riff boxes so after fourteen songs you may be ready for some variety.

An album with a title which offers up the suggestion that, like the galaxy it describes, is vast and with limitless boundaries, 'Laniakea' is a collection which is more epic and melodic rather than Symphonic and orchestral. It's going to be a record which has fans of Nightwish and Delain pricking up their ears as this is something along the same lines yet a little bit different.

Mike Ainscoe

SPEARFISH – 'IN THE MEANTIME...' *(Lion)* — HARD ROCK

Sweden's Spearfish are back with their fourth album 'In The Meantime...' but just like their first three albums, I have a problem with just who this band want to be. The problem for me is that their sound has a confused air, one that leaves you perplexed after listening to it.

In Thomas Thulin they have a vocalist who (at times) sounds not a million miles away from the great Geddy Lee and because of this, the band also (at times) seem to want to ape their obvious musical heroes Rush. Sadly, these Rush-isms aren't found in all of the band's songs and what we get instead is a hotchpotch of musical ideas, where Spearfish don't really seem to know whether they are a Prog or Hard Rock band. And this all makes listening to '... Meantime...' a bit of a disjointed affair.

Now don't get me wrong, Spearfish can certainly write and play good Rock music and in guitarist Peter Lundin they have a star, it's just the fact that from one moment to the next you're not sure whether you're going to hear Rush-like clone songs, such as 'Quicksilver Linings', 'Inspiration' and 'Time Will Come', or melodic Rockers like 'South' or 'Gazing At The Moon'. Then to confuse matters even more, Spearfish throw in a cover of Rush's 'New World Man', which just leaves you scratching your head as to what they are trying to achieve.

Personally I'd have preferred either an entire album of songs that sound a bit "Rushie" or one that is full of Melodic Rock ditties but not a mixture of the two because for me it just doesn't work.

But as I always say, please give the band a listen and make up your own minds as it could just be my cloth ears preventing me from liking this album more than I do.

Ian Johnson

STALA & SO – 'STALA & SO' *(Escape)* — HARD ROCK

Amazingly, this band remains pretty much a secret outside their native Finland, despite being around since 1997. Stala & So is fronted by former Lordi drummer Sampsa Stala and have previously competed in the Finnish heats of the Eurovision back in 2011 with a catchy little ditty called 'Pamela'.

The new self-titled album is a pretty decent introduction to S&S that straddles a few genres but somehow manages to mix it up with a sound all of their own, and no matter which way you look at it, they are Melodic Hard Rock. They even manage to incorporate a Hammond Organ into their sound which is neither over used or cliché.

'I Need More' is as damn fine an opener as you'll hear anywhere, with the Hammond riff almost reminding you of 'Speed King' – but Deep Purple it's not. It's yet another Scandia Hard Rock act with the riffs, looks and just the right amount of snot on their shirt sleeve cuffs to add a little sparkle in a genre that sometimes can be overrun with a lot of "samey" releases.

'When The Night Falls' evokes a little of Wig Wam (I guess the comparison is inevitable given the Eurovision connection) with a touch of Stone Temple Pilots on the vocal delivery. I can see a video of this; dimly lit club, girls dancing, guys hanging back by the bar with this track blasting out and everyone having a blast. It's infectious, catchy as hell and played loud is bloody brilliant. 'Now 'N' Everyday' is another stomping slab of brilliantly executed Hard Rock with the Hammond Organ underpinning the riff and one hell of a Hammond lead – not to mention some tasty guitar work from Sami J.

The almost Punk Pop feel of 'The Girl With Guilty Eyes' calls to mind a tad of Billy Idol at his sneering best, but the riff on this is just so infectious – damn where did these guys come from... yes Finland I know, but seriously, throwing in a choral section on this... amazing; on further listens think Nelson 'A Girl Like That'. Further monsters arrives in the shape of 'You Don't Mind (Devil In Disguise)', which has a hint of FM, and album closer (complete with Guns 'N' Roses-inspired guitar intro) 'Goodbye' to round off what is one of the most genuinely fantastic surprises you could hope for .

Elements of 1970's Classic Rock, Glam, Hard Rock, AOR, Power Pop and Punk all seamlessly intertwine in an album that is not only well played, extremely well produced

and written but deserves to be heard for what it actually is, a fantastic slab of modern day Melodic Rock. You won't be disappointed – how could you be?

Kieran Dargan

STEEL RAISER – 'UNSTOPPABLE' *(Iron Shield)* HEAVY METAL

"I have mood poisoning. Must be something I hate" – Marilyn Manson. The Judas Priest loving Steel Raiser have a punning title and almost a punning delivery. If a pun sounds alike but has different meanings, this music sounds exactly like many other bands but wants to fly alone. Sadly, it's still bumping along the bottom.

It has what we would want from a Metal album alright, double bass drumming, tight and sharp riffing, screaming and gang-chorusing. It's just that, as I've banged on about in excelsis, they are just serviceable; they aren't harder than most, they don't have catchier melodies than most, they don't have bigger riffs than most nor faster feet. They try that last one a few times though, and that's when they become a little more successful – the ridiculously named 'Mole Breaker' rattles along and it's mob chorus seems entirely appropriate, and 'Fast As The Light' might be, well at least as a pocket torch.

"They also try a bit of "synth string" stuff to add, you know, drama which works pretty well on the assisted commercial feel of 'The Last Tears', flowing chorus, solo bubbling up then keening away but not half as good in the melodic attempt that is 'Scent Of Madness'. And there are a few more like this, disappointing us with expectation of memorable Metal.

This album isn't awful of course, it has fun running through it. But in comparison to the Priest, it shrivels in a long shadow; fair enough, but it also languishes in the shadow of many more less storied combos. Not unstoppable, nor undesirable, just undistinguished.

Steve Swift

STEVE KAYNAN – 'MULTIVERSE COLLISION' *(FOK)* HARD ROCK

Florida-based axe-man Steve Kaynan returns with his sophomore effort 'Multiverse Collision'. The album features recordings from the present era as well as unreleased pieces that were recorded between 2001 and 2006. In addition to that, unlike most shredders who focus solely on their guitar playing, Kaynan is no newbie to singing lead (for proof, see his previous, self-titled debut album from 2011).

First up is 'To Infinity & Beyond', a Hard Rock instrumental piece distinguished by nifty, yet tasteful shredding and a sharp, clear guitar tone. The mood shifts quite rapidly with 'Mirrors', its inconspicuously mellow intro developing into a heavy, raucous Modern Rock/Metal track embroidered with partly James Hetfield-esque/partly melodic vocals. 'Isla Nublar' continues in the same manner, juxtaposing rich, juicy lead guitar tones with a muscular, sinister instrumental background.

This is followed by 'Time', a track that brings to mind a combination of 'Black Album' era Metallica with a modern day Black Sabbath (along with a slight Progressive vibe to it) in terms of both music and vocals. The title track once again has Kaynan using his hands wrapped around a guitar's neck rather than his voice as the song itself gravitates musically towards the more melodic spheres of Hard Rock. With its frequent changes of pace, 'My Way' altogether returns to heavier sound aesthetics, flavoured again with echoes of Metallica and some Progressive Metal-infused passages; there is also a fierce, furious guitar solo.

Next are the instrumentals. 'Until The End' which starts off in a ballad-ish mood, with a handful of Blues-laden melancholia, but further into the song things start getting heavy again, ending up at full Rock/Metal throttle. 'Pyramid Lake' brings a portion of equilibristic shredding tricks that is much unlike the following track which is a slow, monumental piece entitled 'Forgotten Season'. The groovy, melodic 'Hook' is again Melodic Hard Rock rather than anything else – and simultaneously a showcase of brilliant rhythm section work. It precedes the album's final track 'Nefertari', another instrumental offering that is not drastically different from its predecessor.

Kaynan's 'Multiverse Collision' is a compilation of different recordings from the last fourteen years and it should be treated as such. The word "compilation" being perhaps a key one here, since it shows many different sides and dimensions to the musician's artistic self but lacks a little in coherence. Shifting from purely Metal shredding to wailing guitar ornaments and from inspired instrumental pieces to Hetfield-like vocal impersonations, Steve Kaynan proves both technical prowess and Blues sensitivity.

Let's hope the release that follows this will be more of a well-knitted, well-measured album that his talent (and he) surely deserves.

Alexandra Mrozowska

STONE ANGELS – 'GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Brighton-based quartet Stone Angels formed in 2011 and after relentless touring throughout the U.K. they are now finally ready to release this, their debut album.

The band manage to merge unashamedly old-school British Classic Rock and Metal with a U.S. Contemporary Alterbridge/Black Stone Cherry/Nickelback – the latter before they went shit (when exactly was that anyway?) – sound, while also throwing in some AC/DC-inspired Rock 'n' Roll riffs and a hint of Mötley Crüe Sleaze.

The likes of 'Misplaced Memories', 'Devil's Child', 'Fantasy', 'Lines In The Sand' and 'Shadows Of The Black Sun' are full of grittily crunching riffs and anthemic gang-choruses, complete with some fiery, wailing guitar solos.

And when they calm things down a little as on 'Last Goodbyes' and 'Thousand Years' they introduce a modern-sounding Southern slant, akin to the aforementioned BSC and what Lynyrd Skynyrd have been doing since 'Vicious Cycle'.

This is nothing new or ground breaking, but an amalgamation of styles that works extremely well, while the execution and commitment is to be applauded.

'Give In To Temptation' – you honestly won't regret it.

Ant Heeks

STORMHAMMER – 'ECHOES OF A LOST PARADISE' *(Massacre)* HEAVY METAL

Debates on whether this is actually Stormhammer after a six year hiatus and a new singer, drummer and guitarist are a bit moot, as it certainly sounds like Stormhammer. What that means is bombastic German Heavy Metal with serious song titles and earnest looks to camera whenever possible. It's all a bit Spinal Tap meets Bad News, but past experience has taught me that cheesy and earnest can bring about entertaining music, so who knows what is hiding in the new Stormhammer's toolbox.

Well the short answer to that question is "nothing new". Stormhammer could be any number of European Metal bands, making acceptable music that will no doubt have appeal to some people but will hardly raise an eyebrow with those who know of all the much better bands they could be listening to. Yes, it's got widdly guitar playing that is pretty good, it's got a decent sense of melody throughout and the vocals are okay (if a little too "shouty"), but 'Echoes Of A Lost Paradise' is an echo of a better band. I should have known better as the two minute intro track put me in a mood instead of setting one.

In summary, Stormhammer offer absolutely nothing that you haven't heard a hundred times before. They are not a bad band by any means, but lack any real sense of soul, leaving an empty shell that someone has poured liquid German Metal into; another one to file under "meh".

Alan Holloway

ROYAL HUNT – 'XIII: DEVIL'S DOZEN' *(Frontiers)* PROGRESSIVE

For those amongst you who know Royal Hunt, I don't have to explain that this massive-sounding, virtuous and innovative group of high-class musicians are always good for a surprise. Only about twenty months after their last release 'A Life To Die For', they are back with a vengeance. Their thirteenth studio-album 'XIII: Devil's Dozen' arrives with two innovations.

The first is their pledge campaign; the band decided to give their fans the opportunity to be even closer to their "heroes" by offering them first-hand information, a direct dialogue with the members and – of course – limited edition merchandise in return for their financial support (for more, see my interview with André Andersen elsewhere in this issue).

The second and biggest surprise for me was the album's sound since RH's mixture of rather classical Progressive Rock with orchestral elements has now became much heavier and more Symphonic Metal-influenced. My guess that it could've been linked to the latest line-up change – Allan Sørensen's changed drum-seats with Andreas Habo Johansson (ex-Narnia) – was proved by Anderson and it isn't for the worse.

'...Dozen' kicks off with a rather RH-typical 'So Right, So Wrong', it's pretty heavy with lots of hidden Progressive elements and a very nice chorus; this would certainly make an ideal opener for future shows! 'May You Never (Walk Alone)' and 'Heart On A Platter' sound similar to the opener, yet heavier, more double bass-influenced and deeper routed in Symphonic Metal. Still, the arrangements were written with a lot of attention to detail and DC Cooper's brilliant vocal abilities give each song a unique touch.

'A Tear In The Rain' is much "darker" with a massive keyboard sound and a very catchy melody. It's as equally strong as 'Until The Day' which shows off the skills of every single band member at their best. 'Riches To Rags' blew me away with a very Folky beginning which evolves into a high-voltage Metal feast. 'Way Too Late' is a Modern Rock piece with a big shot of RH ingenuity that reminded me immediately of 'Running Out Of Tears' and therefore will probably become one of my favourites alongside bonus offering 'How Do You Know' which is simply a KILLER track – no more words needed.

I have to be honest and say my first impression of 'XIII: Devil's Dozen' wasn't too good. The heavier, "very drum-based" sound and different mix didn't go straight into my head. But having listened to this release a couple of times on several different devices, I am strongly convinced that this is an excellent record with a magnificent production which will be enjoyed like a five-star, eight course meal by each of you who appreciates that Royal Hunt loathe musical stagnation.

Julia Braun

STORMZONE – 'SEVEN SINS' *(Metal Nation)* HEAVY METAL

Ireland's Stormzone are back with album number five and John "Harv" Harbinson and the band have recorded what can arguably be called their strongest and best album to date.

The powerfully melodic, dramatic and intense 'Seven Sins' is based around a Harbinson story that deals with very strong subject matter, such as child abuse and disability. It sees the band's recurring character Dr. Dealer returning, this time as a Wild West "snake oil" salesman whose true purpose is to save abused children from their evil parents. Sending his many helpers to the towns he's about to visit, Dealer finds out who the abused and abusers are and then, along with his stunningly beautiful assistant Bathsheba, he sets about rescuing those whose lives are in peril, leaving the abusers to Bathsheba's violent justice which is both swift and devastating.

But a great story wouldn't go anywhere if the music wasn't a match for it and Stormzone have come up with an album's worth of music that not only matches the story but in many places eclipses it. Just sit back and listen to 'Another Rainy Night' with its clever guitar riff, powerful hook and striking arrangement and you'll instantly know that you're about to listen to something that's quite incredible.

From here Stormzone step off the brakes (if they were using any in the first place) and smack in you the face with wonderful songs like 'Your Time Has Come', 'The One That Got Away', 'You're Not The Same', the menacing 'Raise The Knife', the blast furnace caustic romp that is 'Abandoned Souls' and finally the two pronged closing attack that is 'Master Of Sorrow' and 'Born Of The Damned'. These songs will all leave you breathless but itching to hit the replay button once more so that you can enjoy the amazing songs from this album all over again.

'Seven Sins' is without a doubt Stormzone's tour-de-force and the ideas the band have for playing it in a live setting (see interview elsewhere) make this album an even more exciting prospect. As Melodic Metal records go, this one is a bit of a monster and

it's definitely up there with the best ones I've heard this year.

Simply put (and because Harv is of course Irish), "it's a cracker" (sorry).

Ian Johnson

STRONGHEART – 'SCREAM OUT LOUD' *(Epos)* — HARD ROCK

It's always good to hear Metal that features a strong female on lead vocals, so I was looking forward to this debut from Swedish four-piece Strongheart, reckoning that it couldn't be any worse than the cover (the band members being all "Metal" at the camera) would suggest. Thankfully it wasn't, but to be honest that would have been nearly impossible.

Suspect cover aside, Strongheart are an ex-covers band who decided to write their own material, and have gone down the well worn route of bog standard Classic Rock with some flair and a little imagination. Vocalist Jess Heart has a very good, strong voice that suits guitar-heavy Rock down to the ground. She reminds me of the Metal Queens of old, like Lee Aaron, Doro and Joan Jett, spitting fire and brimstone whilst still retaining her innate femininity.

Musically, the songs aren't quite big enough to match up to her, mostly throwing up pretty standard Melodic Hard Rock but occasionally breaking the mould, as in the impressive ballad 'Withered White Rose' or the rousing closer 'Rebel Queen'. The whole thing smacks of being a bit of a b-list, late eighties combination that has a good live show but struggles to be above average on record.

Strongheart aren't going to upset any apple carts with this debut, but it does serve as an interesting introduction for a band that may manage something special next time or with time. The songs are good enough, the playing comfortable and the vocals strong, but as a whole the album lacks the power and passion required to make any listeners scream out loud.

Alan Holloway

TAD MOROSE – 'ST DEMONIUS' *(Despotz)* — HEAVY METAL

Tad Morose returned in 2013 with the unexpected release of 'Revenant'. With only one (truly) original member, that being founder of the band Christer "Krunt" Andersson, and with a history of ever changing line-ups, it was unapparent if they would ever return. But with the new line-up consisting of vocalist Ronny Hemlin, bassist Tommi Karppanen, guitarist Kenneth Jonsson and a drummer that has been a loyal member since 1994 in Peter Morén, Andersson can continue what he started back in 1991 with their brand new, eighth full-length album 'St. Demonius'.

'Bow To The Reapers Release' takes you by surprise, it was not what was expected. Being more melodic has definitely worked in their favour. Hemlin is vocally engaging and gives the album, and also the band as a whole, character. 'Forlorn' contains a tremendously satisfying and dirty opening riff but there seems to something missing, it just needed to go up one notch to provide that supporting drive to guitars.

The album is unfussy and modest and makes for an excellently easy listen. During 'Where Ignorance Reigns' they use simple layers to create different textures with the use of growling backing vocals, clean and distorted guitar and an ever changing tempo. The track takes a halt with guitars and vocals, there is hesitation for the climax which is a well received solo. Sadly the song carries through for an extra two minutes coming back in for another verse and chorus; how about an anti-climax, it seems to fall flat and reverts back to a steady drive.

The melodies in some of the tracks are in need of an adrenaline shot to give them that boost and thrill that any Metal music fan craves. 'Black Fire' is the track that peaks and gives the album that shot! The record's production is weighty and bold; rhythmically it is impressive and this is an exceedingly strong aspect and one that is very potent to the listener.

For any Metal/Power Metal fan, this band and album provides you with the right ingredients. However, it does have a smidgeon of the "Meatloaf syndrome" in terms of not knowing when to stop and sometimes this brings an anti-climax to the end of the song that has already done its job.

Lara Kisel

THE ANAGRAM PRINCIPLE – 'INVENTOR' *(Earthcat)* — PROGRESSIVE

When I first read the press release for this I became quite excited, as it promised everything I want in a Progressive album; two guys from Pittsburgh, Tedd Arnold and Bob Neft, both on vocals, guitars and keys (so you don't know who is doing what on what) with a concept album. How good is that? Then I actually listened to it – no, no, no... no, no, no, no... no, no and once again no.

Due to the fact that I thought I would be listening to something that I was very familiar with, it came as a bit of a shock to find that, while it may be classed as Progressive, it is many, many miles away from Yes, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Dream Theater etc. To be honest, I could not make head nor tail of any of it.

Vocalist Arnold (or Neft, who knows), sounding like a cross between Traffic' singer Roger Chapman and a Dalek, wails on about somebody pulling strings and asks if the sky ever existed. Oh yes, and apparently he got lost waiting for the hour! The synth work on 'Fathom 3327' is more Free Form Jazz than Prog, and the track is eight and a half minutes long.

There are some pretty nifty drums at the start on 'Napalm,' but I can't get past the fact I think that the whole thing is basically devoid of any real melody. The start of 'Master Of Distance' for instance sounds promising, but unfortunately it doesn't go anywhere and by this point the "devoid of melody" singing was now starting to really annoy me. There are some backing vocals in this which I thought sounded much better than the main vocals, but we don't know who is doing them; this track is also almost twelve and a half minutes long.

By now you have probably got an idea of what I think of this album. There are some small parts of decent keyboards and guitar, from somebody, but this is not enough. At no point in the whole album can a real melody be found and there is nothing that sticks in your mind, other than the part where whoever it is shrieks "believe me" in the middle of 'Napalm'.

And let's be honest, regardless of some of the great acts out there from other countries, nobody really does Prog Rock better than the Brits.

Andy Brailsford

THE BLUES REBELS – 'OPEN ROAD' *(Independent)* — BLUES/SOUL

The Blues Rebels are essentially the duo of Dov Hammer (vocals, harmonica) and Andy Watts (guitar), augmented by bassist Amos Springer and drummer Avi Barak. Initially formed in 2012, they have performed with various acts, most notably Johnny Winter.

As their name implies, Blues is very much the name of the game here, though it's a pretty lively affair throughout. The Boogie opener 'All I Want', with a gritty feel due to its Southern Rock-inspired riff, and the driving Rocker 'Seen The Light' sandwich the gentler, almost Poppy sounding 'Before The Jubilee'. 'Devil By My Side' and 'Secret Smile' are numbers that return to that Boogie sound, 'What If' has a moodier, almost darker, vibe and 'Reason To Live' heads into a shuffling Bluegrass Country style, something that also creeps into the albums solitary ballad 'Looking In'. Personally though, I'm not overly keen on the Jazzier feel of 'I Don't Mind' and 'Trying To Get Paid'.

That said, as I'm not a devout Blues aficionado, the one thing that truly spoils the album for me is the fact that Hammer whips out his Harmonica regularly – it makes an appearance on every single track and quickly becomes an irritant for my personal tastes. Watts, however, is the true star of the show with a series of highly impressive guitar workouts – the slow instrumental 'Open Road' (very Mark Knopfler-ish in places) that closes the album is the utmost shining example of his talents.

I'm not a Blues lover but, that damn harmonica aside, this is a pretty decent album – true Blues fans should love it.

Ant Heeks

THE DECLINE – 'RESISTER' *(Pee)* — HARD ROCK

As we all know, Punk Rock ain't dead and if Aussie noise machines The Decline have anything to do with it, it will live on for a fair old while yet. The antidote to "MTV friendly" Pop Punk, TD have released an album that takes Melodic Punk Rock back to its 1990's roots and does a good job grounding it there.

Fifteen tracks (including three under a minute) race by as TD tell us what they think about everything. Vocalist Pat Decline has a perfect voice for this sort of thing; in all honesty the album sounds American, with the Aussie accent only coming through if you listen hard. This isn't a bad thing – just think NOFX, Bad Religion and all their spiky-haired brethren in a blender. Like the aforementioned bands, The Decline have plenty of melody and attitude, bolstered by smart lyrics and an energy that defies the listener not to have a good time.

There's not a lot to really say about this sort of album, as many of the songs will sound pretty similar to most people. It's fast, furious and unashamedly Punk, hearkening back to The Buzzcocks and other more melodic lads of the seventies, but more in line with the Hardcore Pop Punk of the nineties. 'Resister' is designed to kick you in the balls and run off laughing, an album that doesn't disguise what it is and it is all the better for it.

Alan Holloway

TEN – 'THE DRAGON AND SAINT GEORGE' *(Rocktopia)* — HARD ROCK

You wait patiently for what seems like an eternity… and not a single appearance; then, with little fanfare… Ten come along! Yes, those merry men aboard the flagship of British Melodic Hard Rock are back again. This time, it's to mark/celebrate their impressive 20th anniversary, and to pin their patriotic colours firmly to the mast with their first EP since 1999's 'Fear The Force'. 'The Dragon And Saint George' comes hot on the heels of the impressive 'Isla De Muerta', and 2014's 'Albion'; an album that many said was a true return to form for Gary Hughes and company. The EP (adorned with yet more stunning artwork by Gaetano Di Falco) features three brand new refrains alongside another three that fans should be well acquainted with by now.

Quite rightly, the eponymous track kick-starts the opus in fine fashion. If you're not already familiar with it, then it goes without saying that it's quintessential Hughes fayre; mesmeric melodies, hooks and a totally addictive chorus with lyrics that stay loyal and true to the legend. 'Musketeers: Soldiers Of The King' follows in similar fashion, and immediately intimates that the new songs on display here are not throw-away's. Its galloping tempo is a joy to behold whilst the keys provide a cinematic foundation for guitarists Dann Rosingana and Steve Grocott to simultaneously weave their fret-tastic magic, whilst mainstay axe-man John Halliwell provides the rhythmic glue that binds everything together. 'Prodigal Saviour' slows things down a modicum and is pure AOR, reminiscent of the 1996 debut; its mid-tempo melody, catchy bridge and chorus takes a few spins to hit home, but those ever-present earworms soon pounce and Hughes' vocals just getting better with each release. It's rare that we are invited to share in Hughes' personal observations of the world we live in, but 'Is There Anyone With Sense...' allows us that privilege. Carried by a pulsating melody and staccato riffing, he reminds us of recent and past worldly atrocities and how we as residents of this planet should take responsibility. Next up is 'Albion Born', and if you've never heard it, you're in for a treat – this song should be the anthem for The Global Camp Fire Society (if there's such a thing!). This slow burner that builds from haunting vocal histrionics to a patriotic crescendo of awesome musicianship has already staked its place in the pantheon of Ten epics. 'We Can Be As One' brings the EP thoroughly entertaining conclusion; it's classic Hughes balladry of the highest order, supported beautifully by a melancholy keyboard accompaniment, and a short but succinct guitar break; Perfection.

'The Dragon And Saint George' captures a special moment in the Ten's history. Since its inception there have been innumerable highs and lows; but what must be commended is the musical output Ten have bestowed upon us – so many magical songs with captivating lyrical content that can never be extinguished. Thank you and 'Happy Anniversary'!!!

Dave Crompton

THE DREAMING TREE – 'SILVERFADE' *(Cherry Red)* PROGRESSIVE

U.K. Prog Rockers The Dreaming Tree have been round for more than ten years now. 'Silverfade', their fourth studio album, is packed with songs that highlight the best of their Progressive/Alt Rock style with plenty of Hard Rocking guitar from Dan Jones, combining flawlessly with the lush harmonies and dynamic keyboard work of Stephen Barratt.

Opening track 'Yesterday's Tomorrow' immediately showcases the band at their best. A lone Jazz style piano intro leads into a strong guitar riff and the laid back vocals of Chris Buckler. The switching of keyboard and guitar riffs is prominent here (and indeed throughout the album) combing with a strong chorus and nice lead break. 'Heart Shaped Bruises' is again guitar and keyboard driven, alternating through the song and giving one of the heavier middle sections with both competing in some searing lead work.

The real joy of TDT is their ability and quality to seamlessly combine both some tough Rocking and calming melodies within the same song. More than just time changes, there's a natural generic feeling of development and progression of the tracks. I'm still not sure whether to say TDT are a Heavy Rock band with Melodic/Progressive leanings or a Prog band that lets rip with some heavy guitar sounds. And that's certainly not meant as a criticism, quite the opposite, it's a compliment of just how well the songs on 'Silverfade' work and how well the band have managed to encompass and combine Rock, Jazz and Progressive influences.

Other highlights included the understated Bluesy feel of 'Cherry Winters' and 'Song in 7' where the band just locks into a groove that carries you along effortlessly. The drumming of Neil Ablard is impressive throughout, bringing that Jazz/Swing feel to the sound in a similar way to Ian Paice. Indeed, there are several parts of the album that brought to mind some of the keyboard dominated rhythms of Deep Purple's last album 'Now What?', where bass and drums just combine to set a pattern that the rest of the song flows over. Buckler's vocals also impress as a key part of the whole sound; subtle, restrained perhaps at times, but still a focal point in the sound that doesn't get overridden by everything else going on.

With this, their fourth album, The Dreaming Tree have undoubtedly surpassed any of their previous work in developing a style that is both easy to listen to – to relax and let the whole sound wash over you – or with just that little bit of effort there is some serious musicianship going on here to appreciate and admire. Excellent throughout!

Ian Parry

THE LONDON SOULS – 'HERE COME THE GIRLS' *(Feel/Round Hill)* ROCK

The London Souls is a two-piece band from New York City comprising of Tash Neal on guitars/vocals and Chris St. Hilaire on drums/vocals. The music is very retro and harks back to the days of Cream, early Led Zeppelin and even a touch of The Beatles. With a Low-Fi production purposely employed, the band has created an album that could have been produced in any decade post the British Invasion.

The album covers a number of bases under the spectrum of 1960's/1970's music and starts with a Pop track 'When I'm With You', followed by the heavily Beatles-esque 'Steady'. There is a fair size wall of sound on this track from this drum heavy duo but things calm down a bit with the Poppy 'Alone'.

The vocals are strong and stand out on the commercial 'All Tied Down' and in general work best on the Rockier songs. Special mention is warranted for their Blues excursion on 'Honey' with some dynamic guitar soloing and the Funky 'Bobby James' which shows The London Souls have a wide and varied repertoire.

I used the word "retro" at the beginning and I find that word remains the best description of the album – essentially, there's nothing to dislike and something worthy of repeat listens.

Rob McKenzie

THE DEEP – 'PREMONITION' *(Independent)* HEAVY METAL

This is a great slab of authentic NWOBHM that can't help but put a smile on your face and have you reminiscing about those days when hairlines were fuller and waistlines were trimmer.

The reason it sounds so authentic is that the band's genesis actually stretches all the way back to 1982 when they were called Deep Machine. The members went onto a plethora of other Rock and Metal bands but now they're back. A couple of members are missing due to other band commitments (Tokyo Blade) and also ill health, but what they've come up with sounds like a lost NWOBHM gem.

All these songs bar one were written around 1982 for an album but failure to get signed saw the music shelved. Listening to this now, with modern production standards and the experience the band members now bring, suggests they were unlucky not to be picked up in the 1980s.

Their sound has many influences from back in the day. There's the unmistakable charge of Deep Purple in 'The Rider'. The DP comparison is further compounded by the fact that singer Tony Coldman has a touch of Ian Gillian about him, especially when he goes for those higher notes. 'Night Stalker' and the title track have a heavier NWOBHM vibe somewhere between Iron Maiden, Tank and the aforementioned TB.

The powerful 'All I Want' has a Dio authority to its delivery whilst 'Saga' is a slower, epic track about the fate of a sad old man which manages to be quite affecting. Elsewhere 'You Take My Breath Away' and 'Cold-Hearted' hint at the more Melodic Rock sound that would come into vogue later in the 1980s. There's some terrific, old-school twin guitar heroics from Paul Smith and new recruit Mick Feleppa and some splendid, upfront, "in your face" drumming from original member Steve Kingsley.

Despite being music that was originally conceived thirty years ago, it sounds fresh and if you like traditional British Hard Rock and Metal then there's lots to enjoy here.

Duncan Jamieson

THE MENTULLS – 'REFLECTIONS' *(Progblues)* BLUES/SOUL

A good selection of Blues from this youthful U.K. outfit continues to confirm that, with the likes of Aynsley Lister, Joanne Shaw Taylor and Oli Brown, the Blues is still coursing through the British veins.

Claiming to be Progressive, it's Progressive in the way those U.K. artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s were taking and working with the Blues so you could argue in 2015 whether or not that constitutes being Progressive. But label quibbles aside, this is an assured record with some lovely playing throughout.

It's a trio based around the brothers Andrew (on guitar and vocals) and Jamie Pipe (on keyboards) with Nick Colman on the drums. To their credit they manage to create a sound where you don't miss the bass. There's a definite Eric Clapton vibe on 'Silverbird', both in the tone of the guitar and Andrew Pipe's vocals. There is also a suggestion that they have taken notice of Joe Bonamassa as 'Reflections' has his rich Blues meets Rock approach. 'Commotion' taps into an early Santana feel which is welcome and 'Home Tonight' has a laid back J.J. Cale vocal over more Clapton-esque tones. 'I Can't Slow Down' adds a grittier Texan riff with organ spurges.

The riffs are firm but melodic across the disc and there's some glorious soloing which is the album's strength; Andrew Pipe has twice been a finalist for the British Blues Award and you can hear why here. Indeed the songs tend to really take off once the verse and chorus has been dispensed with and the band can get down to instrumental interplay. Andrew Pipe's vocals are fine but the choral hooks are quite low key.

At nine tracks it's quite short considering one track is revisited in an alternate instrumental way. It's not by any means "mental" but it is definitely a well-played, Bluesy Rock album that you should sniff out if you like those classy, early 1970's Rock bands.

Duncan Jamieson

THE MURDER OF MY SWEET – 'BETH OUT OF HELL' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

'Beth Out Of Hell' from Swedish Rockers The Murder Of My Sweet is an ambitious concept album that has been three years in the making. It is constructed around the fictional tale of Lucifer's daughter falling in love with Michael, the Archangel from the 'Book Of Revelation' (New Testament) and all the drama surrounding this dubious courtship.

Some of, if not all, the best concept albums succeed due to the fact that the songs are able to both stand on their own while also allowing the narrative to gently unfold. '...Hell' handles this challenge with ease and never strays into the realm of self-indulgence. The music is as accessible as it is emotional and the band is clearly committed to both presenting a cohesive story as well as composing memorable songs.

While 'Bitter Love' is best enjoyed in the context of the album as a whole, tracks like 'The Humble Servant,' 'Still' and album opener 'The Awakening' embody the band's penchant for the dramatic while creating something refined and elegant. 'Requiem For A Ghost' exploits their influences from bands like Queen as its majestic intro makes for an impressive introduction.

'...Hell' is not the dark and brooding music that is suggestive from the title. As a matter of fact, they have successfully blended Gothic themes with bright, accessible melodies, great musicianship and bookended by cinematic energy. This is a very rewarding musical statement that stands shoulder to shoulder with the best conceptual works released by acts such as Within Temptation (with their 'The Unforgiving' record) and the Pop Rock/Metal leanings from the likes of Issa.

It should then come as no surprise that 'Beth Out Of Hell' comes highly recommended for all fans of Female-Fronted, Melodic/Progressive Metal as this album stands to be one of the highlights of 2015.

Brent Rusche

THE NIGHT FLIGHT ORCHESTRA – 'SKYLINE WHISPERS' *(Coroner)* HARD ROCK

In my review of their first album ('Internal Affairs') in issue #54 I stated – "in truth for this review all I would have to do is write down the bands that The Night Flight Orchestra sound like and leave it at that, those being Kiss, Boston, Styx, The Eagles, Thin Lizzy etc". And that could easily be the review all over again but that would be a huge injustice to TNFO.

Once again this retro Hard Rock band made up of members of Soilwork and Mean Streak have recorded one of the strongest albums of 2015 and it's also an album that takes you straight back to those heady days of 1970's and 1980's Rock, which is the era of music we all nostalgically hanker for. You remember those days, the ones when you first discovered and fell in love with Rock music.

To be honest my favourites on this release have changed each time I've played the album, but for your delectation I would certainly suggest giving a listen to 'Living For The Nightmare' with its almost Disco feel and the captivating 'Stiletto' which has one of the catchiest choruses I've heard this year – "please don't take off your stilettos, they never tell me lies" – which (believe me) is truly infectious once you hear it.

I would also recommend the stunning Kiss-tastic duo that are 'Lady Jade' and 'I Ain't Old, I Ain't Young', the Roy Wood Wizzard sounding 'Roads Less Traveled', the ten minute Santana workout entitled 'The Heather Reports' and finally the Rocking 'Floridian Eyes' (the digi-pack bonus track). After you have listened to these songs, you'll start to wonder why your face hurts so much. The simple answer to the question will be because of that big, stupid grin splitting your face, the one that this band have a habit of giving you when you play their music.

Also just being labelled a retro act isn't enough for The Night Flight Orchestra because not only does the production of the album have that rich, warm resonant 1970's feel to it, the actual disc itself, has been made to look like a vinyl record, which shows just how much this band believe in what they are doing.

If you like Classic Rock or just a big fan of great sounding music then its simple, take a hammer to the piggy bank once again and get yourself a copy of this superb release as soon as you possibly can.

Ian Johnson

THE V – 'NOW OR NEVER' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Some of you might remember a Metal band called Benedictum? Led by the diminutive chanteuse Veronica Freeman, this band have a reputation for making great Metal albums

THE POWWOW ROCK ORCHESTRA – 'EVERYBODY POWWOW!' *(Spiderhawk)* ROCK

Concept albums can be a tricky thing to get right; when they're good, they can be brilliant, when they aren't, they can be a meandering, disjointed mess. 'Everybody Powwow!' is a huge, twenty-one track, double album telling the story of a young coal miner, who travels to America and falls in love with Rosie, a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe. He ends up being conscripted to the army, deserts, and winds up involved in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.

I must admit, I wasn't blown away by the idea and chanced my arm simply because the album featured the likes of ex-Bad Company singer Robert Hart, former Whitesnake guitarist Bernie Marsden and Manfred Mann's drummer Jimmy Copley. The album is the brainchild of Simon Webb, a composer, keyboard player and former Musical Director for the 'Tommy' stage show at the Queen's Theatre. What delighted me the most about the album is how he has not gone for the obvious beating tom-toms and wailing you think of when you first think of Native Americans – this is a Rock album first and foremost, performed by Rock musicians and bolstered by strings and horns.

I'm not going to talk about all twenty-one songs on offer, but suffice to say there isn't one clunker amongst them. Despite offering nearly an hour and a half of music, the album never outstays its welcome. 'Amerikaye' lures you in with its breezy feel, the groovy 'This Is The Life' reminds me very much of the sort of thing Pete Townshend did with 'Tommy', while 'Gold Fever' with its fiddle intro has a Funky vibe. The closing track on the first disk features narration before morphing into one of the catchiest songs on the record.

Female vocalist Emma Pears shines with her clean, lilting voice providing an excellent foil for Hart's masculine rasp. 'Badlands' has plenty of Rock bite while the title track is a gloriously upbeat effort with its keyboard stabs and guitar riffs. It must be noted that Hart handles the lion's share of the lead vocals which, as a big fan of his, was a big plus for me. Frankly, I think it's probably the finest performance of his long career.

I've enjoyed the album more every time I've played it, and I've not had to concentrate too hard on the story to do so. The record works perfectly as a whole, but the vast majority of the songs can easily be taken on their own merit and stand up by themselves. The album artwork may be utter pants, but the music contained within is fantastic and that's what matters. Excellent!

James Gaden

and in Freeman they had a singer with a vocal presence and power that could easily level a mountain.

If you do remember them fondly, you'll be glad to know then that the lady in question has now recorded her first solo album, but it's a big departure from the Metal she is previously known for. Okay, in places, the music is still heavy but equally the music has more of a Rock 'n' Roll, Melodic/AOR, Hard Rock feel to it than you would find on any Benedictum album.

And when these songs are joined with that glorious Freeman voice, you know as soon as this album starts playing that you're in for a treat. In addition, helping her out on this release is a plethora of musical talent including Tony Martin and Chastain's Leather Leone (both of whom she duets with), Jeff Pilson (Dokken, Foreigner), Mike Lepond (Symphony X), Michael Sweet (Stryper), Michael Harris etc and those names should be enough for you to know that you're going to be listening to something a bit special.

Check out the Melodic brilliance that is 'Line In The Sand' and you will immediately hear that Freeman doesn't have to tear your face off when she sings, her wonderful understated performance on this track alone shows just what a flexible singer she is and it doesn't end there.

'L.O.V.E', 'Love Should Be To Blame', the Rocking 'Kiss My Lips', 'Spellbound' and 'Below Zero' are further evidence of just what a talented singer Freeman is. Changing vocal styles like a chameleon changes colour, she breathes life and love into these songs and at the same time seems to be enjoying herself immensely throughout.

That old adage "never judge a book by its cover" is particularly apt here because you might expect Freeman to be nothing more than a dyed in the wool Heavy Metal singer, with no other strings to her bow. On 'Now Or Never' she proves (without a doubt) that she is the full package; not just a good song-writer but a singer with great versatility and one that is not scared to try new things and fully able to conquer them.

As a fan of this lady, I'm not surprised that she's made such a good album but those of you who only know her as Benedictum's vocalist, should grab a copy of this release and be prepared to have your preconceptions blown away.

Ian Johnson

THIRD EYE BLIND – 'DOPAMINE' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

The revolving door of musicians that have been associated with Third Eye Blind continues to turn with drummer Brad Hargreaves and band leader Stephan Jenkins being the only original remaining members. That's true of many band but TEB, and in particular Jenkins', involvement in disputes with several ex-guitarists has been well documented. The latest casualty is bassist Abe Millett who has been dispensed with since 2009's excellent 'Ursa Major'. The six year gap between albums has continued and although Jenkins says that this will be the band's last release, it's probably more a case of "watch this space".

TEB probably became a solo vehicle for the reportedly egotistical Jenkins – I've interviewed him and found him warm, engaging and dry humoured – sometime after the release of the second album 'Blue'. If nothing else, Jenkins (who once earned the affections of Charlize Theron) remains battle hardy with a commitment to putting out music; albeit on a sporadic basis.

'Dopamine' could have been an album that simply went through the motions; let's be honest the classic era of the debut and 'Blue' are well in the past but Jenkins has always been able to write songs that pique the interest, be it with melody or a clever lyrical twist; 'Dopamine' is no different.

Single 'Everything Is Easy' is classic Pop-orientated TEB which is catchy and hummable in an almost Blood Hound Gang way whereas 'Shipboard Cook', a song that's been a staple of the live set for quite a while, is simply a testament as to how good Jenkins is as a song-writer, reeling you in with its hooks and melody.

'All The Souls' is as a good a slice of falsetto Pop as you are likely to hear, whilst 'Say It' (with its lyrical outburst of – "nothing you write will ever match this – you should go back to that actress, or the days you lived on a mattress when everything was new" – hints at Jenkins early career and his relationship with Theron) is certainly the singers most introspective song to date. At over six minutes long and rounded out by the inclusion of an eccentric Techno Pop beat, it's a pointer to Jenkins genius as a forward thinking song-writer.

'Dopamine' – a Funky faux rap song – brings to mind some of Third Eye Blind's past glories and the album as a whole is perfectly paced. Broken up by the acoustic 'Exiles' and 'All These Things', it follows a path of hooks to get the foot tapping interspersed with songs that urge you to pay attention to the lyrics.

Very few have achieved such a brilliant combination, even to this day, and it's one that remains as relevant today as it did on the 1997 debut.

Mike Newdeck

THIRD LUNG – 'IN THE CHRYSALIS' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Reading-based three-piece Third Lung have hit upon a winning formula with their debut album 'In The Chrysalis'. Combining the retro Rock of Led Zeppelin and Free – check out the relaxed vibe of 'Oh Well' or the fast and loose 'Affirmation' – with a more modern 1990's approach that brings to mind Pearl Jam.

Indeed, Tom Farelly's vocals do have a certain Eddie Vedder meets Robert Plant quality although, at times, his screeching reaches Matthew Bellamy (Muse) proportions – such as on the wailing 'Awaiting My Messiah' – which may, depending on your viewpoint, have you reaching for the earplugs.

The guitars, drums and bass sound suitably retro throughout with the guitar in particular bringing to mind the aforementioned Free or even Jeff Buckley in its tone and timbre. First single 'Would It Be' is a good example and yet there's a Bruce Springsteen vibe throughout intimating that Third Lung are way more eclectic than it would first appear.

The organic production of the album is refreshing and perhaps gives you an extremely uncoloured view as to how the band would sound live. It may be retro but that doesn't mean that 'In The Chrysalis' is a formulaic album. In fact, dig deep and this album will reveal a band that provides yet more evidence of the resurgence of original British Rock music.

Mike Newdeck

THIS OCEANIC FEELING – 'UNIVERSAL MIND' *(Cherry Red)* ROCK

I have visions of the allocating of this album going something like this. Our illustrious Reviews Editor was sat in the dungeon of Fireworks Towers salivating over his secret scrapbook of Symphonic sirens when the Master Of The House, Sir Bruce of Mee, pops his head around the door – "another plain brown package for you, Dave" said with a hint of disapproval. Dave with a startled look, quickly replies – "sorry, I thought I'd cancelled... oh, wait! It looks like a potential review, not a ...". Quickly grabbing the package off Sir Bruce our Reviews Ed rips it open and reads the usual promotional blurb – "aaahh, it states that Chris Braide is involved with this lot... I know just the man to review it ..."

Now, rewind to issue #65 and it is clear that my first foray into the world of Braide was a success to say the least. A singer/song-writer/multi-instrumentalist of some repute, he has worked alongside some of Pop's finest, produced albums, released solo albums ('Fifty Dollar Planets And Twenty Cent Stars' really is a gem), and collaborated with Geoff Downes (Yes, Asia) on 'Pictures Of You'.

Now he's back; this time with Ash Soan (drums) and Lee Pomeroy (bass) in tow, delivering what I can only categorize as Prog Pop. But please, don't dismiss it half-heartedly, as this may be that "something a little different" you've been waiting for. Braide compares it to "...that of The Police and '90125' era Yes". One thing you're guaranteed on getting though, are vocals that drip like honey from a spoon; add to that a top class rhythm section and you get a cinematic aural delight.

I must point out here, if you have an insatiable craving for riffing/soaring guitars then look elsewhere because 'Universal Mind' is keys dominated affair. Conceptual in nature, it explores and probes the psychological and psychotherapeutic state of Man's relationship with "self-obsession, virtual personas and overpowering ego" – definitely one to absorb in a single sitting. Highlights are in abundance; 'Lie Detector' is a rather demure, unorthodox opener but entices the listener in, 'Put Down The Gun' has an upbeat melody juxtaposed with sombre lyrics whereas 'Universal Mind' is hypnotically heavenly. 'Radio' oozes commerciality and intimates that a utopia can be reached whilst being confined in a personal dystopia. 'Logotherapy' harks back to TP circa 'Reggatta De Blanc'. On the home straight, 'Karma Camera' is a striking piece with shades of Pink Floyd and the penultimate track 'Seasons Of Light', at over eight minutes, amalgamates all that's gone before.

Is this album suitable for Fireworks? Well, it's melodic music for grown-ups with thought-provoking, intelligent lyrics; so the simple answer is... damn right it is – outstanding!

Dave Crompton

THUNDERMOTHER – 'ROAD FEVER' *(Despotz)* HARD ROCK

Have you heard the one about the three Swedes, the Italian and the Irish woman? No? Well, you should certainly make a point of hearing one by them. Thundermother are an all-female five-piece who are, by all accounts, ready, willing an' able to grab you by the unmentionables and make a mess of your head. They are the stuff of AC/DC-inspired Rock 'n' Roll dreams and, if I was still eighteen, I suspect I'd want to party with these gals all night long.

'Road Fever' is their second album following their 2014 debut 'Rock 'N' Roll Disaster' which crashed into the Swedish Charts at Number 2; with a bit of experience now under their belts, the girls now plan to push the pedal to the metal and take on the world. '... Fever' features ten tracks that bristle with energy and are, as a rule, short and to the point.

There's no messing around here as the album motors along with neither pit stops nor unnecessary dirt track diversions.

'It's Just A Tease' is a lively opener, with Clare Cunningham's gutsy vocals instantly bringing to mind a young Jody Turner (Rock Goddess) with the twin guitar attack of Filippa Nässil and Giorgia Carteri really revving it up. The power of the rhythm section – Tilda Stenqvist (drums) and Linda Ström (bass) – is also apparent, as the band romp through a clutch of "traditionally" titled Rockers such as 'FFWF (Fight Fire With Fire)', 'Deal With The Devil', 'Roadkill' and 'Thunder Machine'.

Throughout there's a real sense of togetherness – a band comfortable with itself, its sound and its direction. Highlights include the meaty riffing of 'Enemy', the catchy sing-a-long-ability of 'Give Me Some Lights', the mid-paced Blues Rock of 'Vagabond' and the joyful, almost danceable, battle-cry of 'Rock 'N' Roll Sisterhood'.

You also get the sense that there's plenty more in the tank – that this is a band that can only get better as they hone their song-writing skills. The trick will be to maintain the freshness, the raw edge and the obvious fun and enthusiasm.

"These Hard Rock chicks will blow your head off!" stated the press release. Empty promises? Well, you get the distinct impression that we're dealing girls who like to deliver. They fully deserve ten out of ten for the energy, the full-on ballsy sound and the vibe, but I'd possibly only award seven out of ten for the songs.

Michael Anthony

TIGER MOTH TALES – 'STORYTELLERS PART 1' *(WhiteKnight)* PROGRESSIVE

Tiger Moth Tales (or Pete Jones as he's better known) is back only a few short months after the release of the wonderful 'Cocoon' album. Why hasn't Jones rested on his laurels? Having decided upon taking up a challenge he'd heard about online, Jones decided to try writing, performing and recording an album in just twenty-eight days and he has only gone and done just that. 'Storytellers Part 1' is the end result and it's as brilliant and "quintessentially English" as 'Cocoon' ever was.

The reason being that Jones has, this time around, used the stories, fairy tales and characters created by the likes of Hans Christian Andersen, The Brothers Grimm, J.K. Rowling and Roald Dahl for his song and lyric inspiration. What's so wonderful for any potential listener is that we get the added bonus of these stories/songs being joined to some of the strongest Prog music and musicianship around.

Be warned however, because some of you might find these songs to be a little bit bonkers (always a good thing in my book) because instead of doing just straight songs, Jones has once again constructed mini-plays, with himself as the narrator as well as acting out all the parts (as he did with 'Cocoon').

Therefore, the likes of 'A Kids Tale' (or 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'), where Jones tells the well known story using his great vocal talents to play the three North of England accented Goats as well as a deep voiced troll, and 'The Piper', which is an epic re-telling of the 'Pied Piper Of Hamelin' story, where we again find Jones cast as the titular character, the town's Mayor and various villagers, might (at first) not be to all Prog fans liking.

However, I urge listeners to stick with this album because it has many hidden depths that only come to light after half a dozen or more full plays. These depths include Jones' subtle but brilliant use of language, the way he has interpreted these stories and makes them work on what is essentially a Prog Rock album and his complete understanding of what melodies are most needed to make Prog Rock work and sound great.

I've only mentioned two songs but 'Story Tellers', 'Beauty Sleeps', 'The Quest For Beauty' are also songs that are so wonderfully poetic and engaging, that you yourselves need go and discover and enjoy them and this superb album for yourselves.

In Jones, Britain has a unique talent and we should cherish him and his music; I know I love it.

Ian Johnson

TIM BOWNESS – 'STUPID THINGS THAT MEAN THE WORLD' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

Tim Bowness inhabits what I'd personally term Nu-Prog, which is the sort of style most commonly associated with the likes of Radiohead, Porcupine Tree and the ubiquitous Steven Wilson. Musical taste is subjective and whilst liking Prog a great deal, this sub-genre has never really resonated with me. Frankly, I find it rather dreary and far from the uplifting experience I'm seeking from music, consequently I wasn't expecting to enjoy really this album. However, after three days listening to it while driving I've really got into it.

The question arises why I like this yet not a great deal of the output of the aforementioned artists? Primarily it comes down to tunes and Bowness clearly has a fine ear for melody and hooks. He's also very good at arranging tracks so that they maintain interest and don't fall into the trap of being perpetually dreary or one-paced, which is a factor that puts me off this genre. Part of the pleasure I have taken from this album have been the nuances of sound, the lightness and deftness of touch plus the arrangements; they've put a smile on my face.

'The Great Electric Teenage Dream' opens with an ominous drum-beat and a doomy piano but it cleverly builds from there. Lyrically, as is the case across the entire album, Bowness is very impressive. 'Sing To Me' is quite superb; it's difficult to believe something so delightful had its origins in a lost No-Man (his collaboration with Wilson) song. A mournful piano refrain and breathy vocals lay the foundation with lovely guitar and violin accentuations fleshing out the sound in a manner that could almost pass unnoticed, so subtle are they. The moment when the drums kick in and the power increases is wonderful as is the instrumental section with its terrific guitar solo. As for the bass synth, all I can say is wow!

'Where You've Always Been' demonstrates how powerful a simple piano refrain can be while strings provide depth. The title song features a drum & bass beat (or is that Dub?) which I shouldn't like but I do and the fabulous melody is an absolute winner. 'Know That You Were Loved' is based around a lovely acoustic guitar motif while 'Press Reset' starts slowly but ends with a bang that hints at Muse; it's certainly the Rockiest track on offer.

'All These Escapes' is short and sweet, 'Everything You're Not' is in the established style while the short instrumental 'Everything But You' nods in the direction of Jethro Tull thanks to the flute. Closing number 'At The End Of The Holiday' is melancholy but nonetheless pleasing.

Well worth checking out; I'm glad I did.

Gary Marshall

TRANSIENCE – 'TEMPLE' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Transience come described as Melbourne's "six piece Prog wizards" – now if that doesn't conjure up images of Rick Wakeman styled capes, pointy Gandalf hats, long beards and intense Hammond-led songs of journeys to far off lands, real or imagined, then nothing does. Far from it though, Transience are of the new breed.

Housed in a contemporary and arty gatefold, the eleven tracks of 'Temple' amount to over an hour of their take of modern, clean, crisp Proggyness with several pieces crossing the eight and nine minute barrier to show they have the song-writing stamina and instrumental prowess which is almost obligatory if you want to be taken seriously in the Prog world.

A suitably "tuning up" styled sound effect introduces the instrumental 'Anglophobia' which via its simple guitar notes and bombastic outbursts provides a dramatic overture and sets the scene for what's about to come.

Singer Robert Cuzens gets his chance to clear his throat at the start of the following 'Disillusion' – a classic gig opening moment if ever there was one – imagine the band setting the scene and him striding onstage to deliver the first of an impressive set of vocals which range from to sensitive and delicate to skirting the edge of the growling vocal style which divides so many.

'Nails' is the first number which is of the more "heavy duty" variety and very much fits the band's "no rules, limits or ingredients" template. With a crunching groove, it dips and dives through atmospheric passages and changes in pace, emerging into 'Skirmish', something which gives a flavour of a more commercial direction; certainly a more accessible number with some moments where the melodies are very strong. Together with 'Sister' and 'Endless Change' it provides a brief mid-album respite from the urgency of the opening twenty minutes and gives a chance to reflect on the impact of the three guitar pronged attack of Tim Davies, Bob Parry and Lincoln McGregor-Smith.

The short instrumental 'Trevelyan' ushers in a final fifteen minutes which pull the album together in the euphoria of 'People's Temple' and 'Shining Lights' which express some more philosophical views and range in delivery from reflective to manic and go to strengthen the view of Transience as an ambitious band who have the potential to spread their wings beyond the southern hemisphere.

In an Ashes Summer of 2015, Transience typify in their music the Aussie sporting attitude of taking take no prisoners and going for the jugular. An album which is of test match status in its vastness, yet dispensing the same sort of battering as a Twenty20 blast sees them seemingly set to become literally heavy hitters.

Mike Ainscoe

V0ID – 'KEEP FIGHTING' *(Raven Black)* HARD ROCK

V0id (with a zero!) are a four-piece band from – as they describe it themselves – "deepest darkest Wales". Featuring Wayne Doyle on guitar/vocals, Gary Doyle drums, Andrew Kowalik guitar and Wayne Esmonde bass, this band came like bolt out of the blue to me because I hadn't heard of them before. However reading comments by many well respected Rock journalists about just how good their two previous albums were, I can't

U.D.O. – 'NAVY METAL NIGHT' *(AFM)* HEAVY METAL

Stalking the stage like some tormented demon whilst spitting and snarling like a cornered banshee… 'Screaming For A Lovebite'… that's the enduring image of Udo Dirkschneider burnt into my brain.

Love him or loathe him (and yes, I get the Marmite connection), no one could deny that the diminutive powerhouse from Wuppertal has been one of the most important influences on the development of Metal for more than forty years. Obviously, he was pivotal to the mighty Accept sound that took the 1970's building blocks of Judas Priest to a whole other level in the early 1980s, but since the relationship between him and Accept main-man Wolf Hoffmann seems to be completely beyond repair, his attention is now fully-focussed on his namesake band U.D.O.

U.D.O. (of course) is nothing new – indeed debut 'Animal House' dates back to the mid-eighties and one of his more significant spats with Hoffmann and the Accept camp – and over the years they've probably come to mean almost as much to the ever growing legion of Dirkschneider fans. With a back catalogue of songs that even eclipses that of Accept (in magnitude at least), U.D.O. are a significant force on the European (nay global) Metal live scene, with regular festival appearances and extensive tours keeping the name in the mix.

There have been a clutch of U.D.O. live releases in recent years so the announcement of yet another hardly set my pulse racing, but wait a mo... this one is a bit different. In early 2014 U.D.O. played a very special show; the usual sell-out crowd treated to something the band had never tried before... they were accompanied throughout by a German Navy Orchestra (The Marinemusikkorps Nordsee). A somewhat strange pairing on paper I'll grant you, but as the likes of Metallica have proved in the past, when done properly it actually adds a whole other dimension to proceedings. This DVD/CD pairing captures that night.

No ubiquitous Accept classics in this set (that's a good thing), instead you get treated to a full-blown U.D.O. live workout with songs cherry picked from their entire career. A Metal band at heart (natch), whilst U.D.O. have always been characterised by intense riffs and thumping rhythms they've never lost sight of catchy hooks and anthemic choruses, and with the orchestra blazing away behind them these nuances are accentuated even more. I'm not even going to attempt a track by track critique (too much time, too little space), but suffice to say the likes of 'Animal House', 'Independence Day', 'Faceless World' and 'Dancing With An Angel' (a duet with the guesting Doro Pesch) are just some of the highlights from this unforgettable night.

Another priceless time capsule for the archives!

Dave Cockett

deny I couldn't work out why that was?

Thankfully however I've caught up and now have their brand new album 'Keep Fighting' spinning away in the death deck and I'm happy to report that the music of V0id makes me smile as I listen to it. '...Fighting' is a superb mix of the band's own style of Melodic Rock, The Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics (maybe it's a Welsh thing?) and Rubber, which makes this album a real listening pleasure.

The songs on this release are loosely based around the challenges that life throws up at you, hence the album's title and when you play this album and turn up the volume, the exuberance and fire V0id have poured into their songs and performances, sets the feet a tapping and the head nodding as you listen to it.

'Not The One' is all jangly guitars and bouncy riffs that hit hard, the fantastic title track has some superb heartfelt lyrics that make you stop and think whereas 'Forever's Yesterday' is a driven Rock song that has a big hook and some nice guitar work. Alternatively, 'Where Have You been' is a slower number with strong emotional vocals and a jarring guitar riff that stays with you long after the song has finished playing whilst 'Say My Name' has an almost Punk feel, with its caustic guitar riffs and attacking vocals.

To say that I was blown away by this album, due to its impressive songs, performances and production, would be an understatement. Everything about it just hit the spot for me and 'Keep Fighting' is a perfect introduction to the world of V0id and their music. Do yourselves a favour and check this excellent band out, you'll be glad you did.

Ian Johnson

VARIOUS ARTISTS – 'MAGIC BUS: HUGE HITS FROM THE HIPPIE TRIAL' *(Universal)* ROCK

It seems as soon as we sniff the scent of summer, every record company is issuing an album full of songs aimed at the weather, driving or some awful power ballads selection featuring the same songs from the likes of Jennifer Rush and Bonnie Tyler. In this case it's a three disc set aimed at the "Summer Of Love" and the "Hippy" era. Straight off, it is worth noting that the music contained within this collection is at least the original artists and not re-recordings as so many often are.

But it is equally worth mentioning that this is one of those compilations that will probably split opinion as to whether it should be in a publication such as this. There is indeed a heavy selection of sixties tracks which may not quite be the Rock that is usually featured within these pages, but on the other side of the coin there is an equal amount of tracks from bands that are regularly mentioned.

Admittedly, Frank Zappa may be spinning in his grave at the thought of being part of it I am sure, Deep Purple might be surprised to see who they are included with and Lynyrd Skynyrd's 'Sweet Home Alabama' is a somewhat bizarre addition. But for any readers who lived through this era, those who might have varied tastes or those who simply fancy taking a break from the manic modern day world, there is plenty to recommend here (although it might be a step too far for the majority of pure Metalheads).

Each of the individual three discs is marked as "Turn On", "Tune In" and "Drop Out", a counterculture phrase popularised by Timothy Leary in 1966. If there is one negative, I have to say I was disappointed that there was not more text within the presentation side of this, offering some musical education into the social commentary that so many of these songs tapped into. But in fairness to this collection, there are some terrific offerings with a pleasant variety spread across the three discs.

The album opens with a well known name to these pages in The Who and, unsurprisingly, their track entitled 'Magic Bus'. Other selections from the first disc (containing the most "non-Fireworks" type acts) include the lush, melancholy masterpiece that is Matthews Southern Comfort 'Woodstock' and Buffalo Springfield's 'For What It's Worth'; a classic protest song of its time and one that featured the then youthful Neil Young. The Band's 'The Weight' is a Southern Country pleasure no one should be denied and I must admit The Fifth Dimension's 'Age Of Aquarius' camp musical soul is certainly a guilty pleasure. Also incorporated are other "classics of their time" such as The Lovin' Spoonful's 'Summer In The City', Simon And Garfunkel's 'A Hazy Shade Of Winter' and Harpers Bizarre's '59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)'.

Disc two brings more Fireworks centred bands (and well-known songs) into the equation with the likes of 'Whipping Post' by The Allman Brothers Band, Purple's 'Hush', 'On The Road Again' by Canned Heat and the aforementioned '...Alabama' from LS, but I could have done without Sonny And Cher's 'I Got You Babe', even though it certainly has its place chronologically. Some of the "lesser Fireworks type" material includes 'Both Sides Now' by Judy Collins, Peter, Paul and Mary's 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone?' and 'Sunshine Superman' from Donovan.

The third and final disc brings into focus largest collection of artists you would usually find within these pages such as Cream's 'Sunshine Of Your Love', 'Born To Be Wild' by Steppenwolf, Zappa's 'Peaches En Regalia', 'Race With The Devil' from Gun, 'White Rabbit' by Jefferson Airplane, Jethro Tull's 'Living In The Past' and 'Something In The Air' from Thunderclap Newman. Once again there are a smattering of artists not generally considered usual for this magazine such as 'Tiny Dancer' from Elton John, 'For Your Love' by The Yardbirds and Simon Dupree & The Big Sound's 'Kites'.

Considering the wealth of material from such legendary artists and groups that span the likes of The Beach Boys, Grateful Dead, Santana and Janis Joplin, this is a terrific collection of music. For anyone of a seasoned age, this will be a glorious trip down memory lane, and the younger generation will find this an education to why this was called the "swinging" sixties and "groovy" seventies.

Ray Paul

VOODOO HILL – 'WATERFALL' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Italian guitarist Dario Mollo first came to most people's attention in 1999 when he formed his project The Cage, featuring ex-Black Sabbath vocalist Tony Martin. The album was a great collection of Hard Rock, and Mollo used the same template of his music being paired up with the lyrics of a distinctive singer in 2000, when he put out the excellent Voodoo Hill with Glenn Hughes on vocals.

2002 saw him reunite with Martin for 'The Cage 2', and in 2004 he returned to Hughes for the second Voodoo Hill effort ('Wild Seed Of Mother Earth'). Things went quiet for a while – there was talk of Mollo teaming up with Graham Bonnet for a project called Electric Zoo, but unfortunately nothing materialised. After a long recording silence, Mollo returned with Martin in tow to complete a trilogy with 'The Third Cage' in 2012, and now we find him adding a third VH album with Hughes.

I wasn't expecting a new VH album, but for whatever reason, Hughes and Mollo have put together a collection of eleven brand new songs. I must be honest, after the first couple of spins I wasn't as enamored as I had been with the two previous Voodoo Hill efforts. 'All That Remains' is a good enough song to open with, but Hughes sounds quite restrained vocally. Those who don't like some of his histrionics may prefer this more toned down approach, but I know he's got so much more in the tank. He proves it halfway through 'The Well', a track which boasts a classic Mollo riff and sees Hughes start to cut loose with that roar only he can do.

'Rattle Shake Bone' powers along and sees Hughes much more like his usual self – although for those who dislike his screaming, I can only remember one scream on the entire album. The ethereal 'Underneath And Down Below' is a real grower while the title track is a huge, sweeping epic tune. 'Karma Go' is an energetic, gusty Rocker, while the bass driven 'Evil Thing' has one of the best hooks. The heavy 'Eldorado' is another strong effort worthy of your time.

'Waterfall' is a classic example of an album that should be classed as a "grower" – originally I felt it was a bit one paced because it didn't have a breakneck Rocker like 'Spun In Lost Wages' or 'Dying To Live' which could be found on its predecessors, nor did it have a ballad like 'The Golden One'. However, repeated listens have revealed a strong, cohesive album containing good, solid Rock. A pleasant surprise after such a long absence!

James Gaden

WILSON – 'RIGHT TO RISE' *(Razor & Tie)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Detroit five-piece Wilson opened for Halestorm on their March U.K. tour and after catching just one song at the Manchester Apollo show I left for the bar. To be fair, that was more an indication of how bad the sound was rather than the performance of the band itself and it took just one spin of their new album to reinforce that opinion. Kudos to band members Chad Nicefield, Jason Spencer, Kyle Landry, Puhy and James Lascu, firstly for creating a great set of songs and secondly for getting me to work a lot quicker than usual.

The album contains twelve slices of adrenaline-fuelled Hard Rock and there is not a ballad in sight. From the opening assault of the title track through to the closing mini epic 'Before I Burn', there is no let-up in intensity and also no let-up in quality. In fact '...Burn' demonstrates the band's ability to switch between aggression and acoustic subtlety without any loss in energy.

The Sleazy swagger of both 'Satisfy Me' and 'Give 'Em Hell' display a Velvet Revolver vibe running through them, whilst the anthemic structure of 'The Flood' reminds me a lot of Billy Squier's 'The Stroke'. All the other songs merit mention but space limits my appraisal. I will say that the testosterone enriched melodies scream to be heard. Throughout the album the guitar solos adhere to the context of the song and are not just an exercise in ego massaging.

The writing and recording sessions were split between Motor City and Atlanta, under the guidance of producer (and writer) Johnny Andrews, and it seems the emphasis was more on the songs rather than the caustic belligerence of the 2013 debut 'Full Blast Fuckery'. I could have done with the mix being more "in your face" to give the sound that extra punch the material warrants but that is a small quibble.

Coming across like Pop Evil's tougher brother, Wilson manage to combine a brash attitude and great musicianship to create some instant songs with a forceful impact. As a follow-up to 'Full…', 'Right To Rise' ticks every box for me and is possibly more commercial. That doesn't mean the pink & fluffies will take it to heart, but it will resonate with those of a more incendiary musical palette.

Dave Bott

VINDICTIV – 'WORLD OF FEAR' *(MelodicRock)* HARD ROCK

Nothing beats a little Neo-Classical played loud. Vindictiv have been around quite a while now with three previous efforts under their belt, the first two featuring Goran Edman on vocals and Marco Sandron on the third. Now this fourth offering, 'World Of Fear', features a new singer in the shape of current Dokken bassist (??) Mark Boals.

Now just a little comment on class here; any album featuring Boals, Marco Minnemann (drummer extraordinaire who made the last five in the Dream Theater auditions) Nalle Påhlsson (Treat) on bass and the sadly recently deceased guest keyboardist Mats Olausson is actually in danger of being called some kind of "super-group". Guitarist Stefan Lindholm is also a mighty tasty player, ripping out riff after riff and some exquisite soloing on the eleven tracks on offer. Not to be outdone, other guest keyboardist Mark Basile (their regular being Pontus Larsson) is absolutely marvellous as well, if a tad guilty of overplaying occasionally – but considering it is this good, that's a very minor quibble.

'Paralyzed', one of the standout tracks on offer, is blessed with Boals soaring effortlessly over a sonic warzone created by the rest of the band, including Lindholm's arpeggios that are topped off with an incredible show of ivory tinkling by the aforementioned Basile (just where has he been hiding?). 'Day' is yet another master-class in... to be frank, just about everything. Boals in the higher register echoes shades of Jon Anderson (Yes) in his prime whilst Lindholm's solo work is again mightily impressive and right up there with people such as Yngwie Malmsteen, Jim Matheos and many more.

I could write word after word on each and every song, however it is largely unnecessary as the sheer class contained here along with the excellent song-writing, musicianship and production sells itself; my only job is to tell you just how good this is and it is good. I could have done without the cover of Malmsteen's 'Far Beyond The Sun' and would have preferred another original track, but that's a minor issue in the grand scheme of things.

If you like your Rock on the Neo-Classical side, this should be right up your street and a fantastically enjoyable listen... more please!

Kieran Dargan

WINTER CALLING – 'AS DARKNESS FALLS' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Is that really Iron Maiden's 'Wasted Years' with just piano and vocals, that's audacious. It also takes away that stunning, bubbly riff. Oh, it works you say? Impressive...

This is just one of the surprising things about 'As Darkness Falls'. These Floridians, presenting their debut after two years of existence, have produced songs which, at their best, have a Classic Rock inclination which really soothes the soul whilst raising the fist. 'Self-Righteous Parade' showcases Chris Hodges' surprisingly chart-inclined vocals beautifully, allied with pianos and rock-fall drums for real success. 'Forever' isn't afraid to stand Indie next to Melodic Rock – they regard each other warily for a while, then start dancing together and laughing giddily, a tight little riff opening it's coat to reveal glimpses of glory, then tiring of being so coy and laying out on a chaise longue, ripping out a lovely solo. Likewise, 'The Stand' throws in the kitchen sink and then goes back for the bath taps too. When it's like this, you really want it never to stop.

Unfortunately, they then seem to run out of inspiration and in the latter part of the album and give us a series of conforming songs which sound either exactly like what Prog Metal sounds like all over the world or what Indie sounds like all over the charts. 'Make It Rain' is standard Proggy soundscape, 'Everyone Has A Story' is faux Rammstein power and '108' a lumpen Prog Metal instrumental.

There are moments of real success here, but they spoil it with orthodoxy. Either through fear, exhaustion or design, they run for the comfort of a familiar sound. Come on lads, don't be afraid of the dark...

Steve Swift

XANDRIA – 'FIRE & ASHES' *(Napalm)* SYMPHONIC METAL

There's nothing like a good dollop of German Symphonic Metal to go with your morning cornflakes and Xandria's (thirty-five minute, seven track) "stopgap" EP certainly has more than enough power to wake anyone up and set them up for a hard day at the Playstation.

Fans may be in two minds about 'Fire & Ashes'; firstly because there's only three new tracks and secondly because there's a Meat Loaf cover. Yes, Xandria may seem to have scraped the barrel by deciding to cover 'I'd Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That)', but it seems fair to shoot the elephant in the room first by saying that I really like it. Dianne van Giersbergen has a superb voice and, for me, injects plenty of passion into what is (in the end) a cracking Jim Steinman song that just got overplayed. Trust me, if this was the first time you'd ever heard it you'd be blown away.

As for the three new tracks, 'Voyage Of The Fallen' kicks things off, and it's a full-on fiesta of widdly guitar, Operatic vocals and high drama – exactly what the doctor ordered. To give you a good idea of what to expect, as I write this someone just came up and asked me if it was Nightwish. Second track 'Unembraced' continues along at a fair old pace with the final new song, 'In Remembrance', unsurprisingly slowing things right down and opting for a 'Lord Of The Rings' soundtrack vibe. It's quite a beautiful song even though I do prefer the faster stuff.

Apart from '...That)', Xandria also deliver a good cover version of 'Don't Say A Word' which was originally by Sonata Arctica. For the uninitiated it's a fast paced Rocker that allows van Giersbergen to really let loose, with the band providing a wonderfully aggressive, crunchy backing. Hearing it sung by a female vocalist really changes the song, and even improves it (ooh…sacrilege, burn the heretic!).

The track listing is rounded off with two "remakes" of classic Xandria tracks 'Ravenheart' and 'Now & Forever'. Both are already excellent tracks and there's not much taken or added to the original, even with a different singer. If you're new to the band though, they should make you want to search out the respective albums.

Overall, '...Ashes' is certainly worth a few of your hard earned pounds. The three new tracks and two covers are all top notch, with the re-recordings just fleshing out the running order if I'm honest (they don't call me "Honest Al" for nothing). As long as the price is right, there's no real reason not to get this and if you've ever felt curious about Xandria, 'Fire & Ashes' is a perfect introduction.

Alan Holloway

YEAR OF THE GOAT – 'THE UNSPEAKABLE' *(Napalm)* HARD ROCK

The first time I heard the music of Year Of The Goat, was when retired Reviews Ed Paul Jerome Smith played their last album 'Angels Necropolis' to me at his house. I sat there mesmerized as I listened to this band who turned out not to be a wall of metallic noise (their music was described in the record company bio as Gothic Occult Metal) but instead a subtle blending of Doom Rock and early Blue Oyster Cult.

Ever since that day, YOTG have been on my Rock radar and as soon as this new release came up on the review schedule, I immediately grabbed it. What I find so entrancing about YOTG's music is that even though it has an epic and grandiose feel, it is also so easily accessible and engrossing that, from beginning to the end, the listener cannot help but be captivated by what they are hearing.

Opening the album with the twelve minute 'All He Has Read' is a stroke of genius because if you haven't heard this band's music before, then this one song capture's the pure essence of what YOTG are all about. The majestic guitars, bass and Mellotron intricately weave their heavy and darkly ominous melodies throughout the songs length, whilst the rich sumptuous vocals of Thomas Sabbathi (the star of the show) work their devilish magic on you. Then you progress further and delve deeper into the album, you'll find yourself leaning forward in your seat, truly excited to hear what this band will do next.

'Pillars Of The South' has superb guitar work that is reminiscent of Donald 'Buck' Dharma' at his best whilst the up-tempo 'Vermin', is, for a Doom band, very catchy and melodic with strong harmonies and hooks; this is about as poppy as YOTG get. Due to word limits I only have space left to mention the superb 'Black Sunlight' which, for me, is easily the best song on the album. It has a huge chorus, some stellar musicianship and the song's intensity is so potent that it's wonderful to revisit and enjoy time and time again.

Year Of The Goat might not be a name on every Fireworks readers (and writers) lips but they deserve to be. Why? Well because they make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck and give you that tingle down your spine when you listen to their music, which always tells you that you're listening to something that is amazing; a brilliant album indeed.

Ian Johnson

WEARING SCARS – 'A THOUSAND WORDS' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

British vocalist Chris Clancy released one album as the front-man for American outfit Mutiny Within before returning to the U.K. to link up with former Sacred Mother Tongue guitarist Andy James and form the London-based Wearing Scars. The line-up is completed by James's former band-mates Lee Newell (drums) and Craig Daws (bass) as well as guitarist Daniel Woodyer.

WS are not easily pigeon-holed as their musical style encompasses a number of genres but everything comes together like a glorious Metal/Modern Rock/AOR hybrid. Six of the songs on 'A Thousand Words' have a vibe one would normally associate with a band from the U.S.A. or mainland Europe and are jaw-droppingly good. Opener 'Become Numb' (first single) is full of bravado, packed with melody and attitude and the assault on the senses is a great way to start. 'Better' begins with a barrage of double-kick drums and big riffs but once the song settles down it is difficult not to get caught up in the sumptuous arrangements.

These two songs are fantastic but there three other that take things to an even higher level. 'Butterfly' is one of the songs of the year so far for me. It has an epic quality due to the orchestral enhancements and the hook simply soars. 'Gone Forever' and 'Heart In Your Hands' follow suit, again the music is infectious and the chorus in each would make many an AOR anorak weep.

'I Could Never Say' picks up the pace again but certainly not at the expense of melody, the guitars cutting a swathe and taking no prisoners. 'A Last Goodbye', 'Letters', 'Stand Alone' and 'Waiting For The End' have more of a Metal feel, reminding me a little of Sonic Syndicate in the tempo and song structure but not the vocals. The title track is an emotionally charged ballad, brimming with subtle power and elegance and a return to the forceful nature of the earlier more Melodic Rock flavoured material. 'Wounds' brings things to a close, dominated initially by big guitars and drums before the chorus takes hold to raise goose-bumps.

The sound on 'A Thousand Words' is big and bold; the mix highlights the guitars and they really impress without overshadowing the overall impact of each song. And what a set of songs they are, this is "Album Of The Issue" for me (and there have been some other great releases to review) and music of a relentless quality that I never thought I would hear from a British band.

Dave Bott

YOUNG GUNS – 'ONES AND ZEROES' *(Virgin EMI)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

High Wycombe's finest return after an absence of three years following the release of 2012's excellent 'Bones'. That album essentially announced to the world that not all Modern Rock is the preserve of the U.S. with Virgin EMI sitting up, taking notice and signing the band.

It should be no surprise that 'Ones And Zeroes' caters for the American market. From the smooth Techno-orientated production of Daniel M. Nakamura (aka Dan The Automator) and the keyboard fills, it's clear that YG would now rather be mentioned in the same breath as The Killers than some rough and ready British Rock band.

Gustav Wood's vocals have improved immeasurably since 'All Our Kings Are Dead', giving extra panache to songs like the 1980's New Romantic Rock of 'Memento Mori' or the shimmering TK-like 'Lullaby'. Keyboards twinkle throughout and although 'Ones And Zeroes' lacks the odd killer song that benefited 'Bones', it's a far more thoughtfully constructed and consistent album.

'Daylight', 'Rising Up' and the 30 Seconds To Mars-influenced 'Infinity' straddle the line between Pop and Alternative Rock with enough originality and intricacy to suggest that Young Guns has finally grown up and found their niche.

Mike Newdeck

ZANDELLE – 'PERSEVERANCE' *(Pure Steel)* HEAVY METAL

Zandelle may well be an unfamiliar name to some; yet far from being a new band to the scene, they have a history going back almost two decades and 'Perseverance' represents their fifth studio album to date and the follow-up to 2009's 'Flames Of Rage'.

The band was formed way back in the mid-nineties by former Gothic Knights vocalist George Tsalikis and have treaded a course incorporating Power Metal with strong Progressive elements drawing on influences such as Helloween and more notably Virgin Steele.

Overall 'Perseverance' is decent effort, if not a little derivative of the genre. Everything you expect is there from the bombastic instrumental opener 'Resurgence' to the galloping double-bass drums, scything riffs and furious guitar/keyboard interplay along with the stratospheric vocals that nod in the direction of David DeFeis.

There's just an ultimately unsatisfying feeling that each songs drifts by without standing out. Maybe that's down to the rather flat production as certainly some of the instrumentation from keyboardist Josh Tuckman and guitarist T.W Durfy is pretty impressive.

Strangely however, the album really picks up towards the end with the title track's uplifting chorus and multiple mood changes along with some strong vocals from Tsalikis and some excellent guitar/keyboard interaction which shows what they can do. Even better is 'Avenger Of The Fallen', a real mid-tempo stomper in the vein of Michael Schenker Group's 'Desert Song'. Again some superb keyboards really add to the atmosphere and the wonderful multi-layered harmony vocals during the chorus really add a touch of class.

While the Power Metal/Progressive Metal market place is pretty packed right now with some top class acts, it's doubtful that Zandelle quite have what it takes to break through to the very top. But if they can create more songs in the vein of the title track and the excellent '...Fallen' while also adopting a more punchy production, then there is every chance that they could make some serious inroads into the scene.

Mick Burgess

RE-ISSUES

ACCEPT – 'OBJECTION OVERRULED' *(Cherry Red/HNE)* HEAVY METAL

Most notable bands get some or most of their albums re-issued these days and Accept are no exception. Cherry Red have done the honours on this occasion with Andy Pearce re-mastering the original tapes from 1993 and giving 'Objection Overruled' a fresher, crisper sound although lacking the warmth of my original vinyl copy.

With sleeve notes from the inimitable ex-Kerrang! writer Malcolm Dome and comments from guitarist Wolf Hoffmann and drummer Stefan Kaufmann, he paints a picture of a refreshed and re-energised band coming together again with singer Udo Dirkschneider, almost four years after the fall-out with replacement vocalist American David Reece during the U.S. tour of 'Eat The Heat' that proved a critical and financial failure as Hoffmann and bassist Peter Baltes' decision to try and break America with an American sound backfired spectacularly.

As a comeback album of sorts it didn't actually receive as big a fanfare at the time as you might have expected; although as far as doing everything in-house, this extended to the cover shot (that was taken by Hoffmann himself – a keen amateur photographer at the time which he now also does professionally) of Baltes (if I remember) with his hands tied behind his back. It broke into the German Top 20 hit parade and just missed out on the Japanese, Swedish and Swiss Top 20 charts.

Musically it had everything an Accept album was known for; the solid, heavy chugging riffs, the fast paced nature of their proto Speed Metal days, the familiar gravelly roar of a fired-up Dirkschneider, the gang vocals on the choruses and the melodic, sometimes classically driven solos from Hoffmann. Typical head-banging fare in 'I Don't Wanna Be Like You', the melodic drenched sing-along 'All Or Nothing' – that was possibly a left-over from the '...Heat' sessions – and the solid 'Bulletproof' all mixed in with the obligatory ballad in 'Amamos La Vida' (We Love Life) with Dirkschneider's unique clean delivery; an acquired taste for some, still giving it a resonance that doesn't sound contrived. Throw in an instrumental from Hoffmann in 'Just By My Own' to sit alongside the Hard Rockers and you have a very solid, typical Accept album that was kind of overlooked in its day but well worth re-exploring.

As a re-issue I would have liked to have seen the Japanese bonus track 'Rich & Famous' included, a great sing-along Rock 'n' Roller that I'm convinced is from their circa 'Breaker' days – sometimes re-issues are packed with extras, other times they come in the original format and this can sometimes have a bearing on whether or not to purchase. However, if you don't already have this, then what are you waiting for?

Carl Buxton

AUGUST REDMOON – 'HEAVY METAL U.S.A.: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS' *(Cherry Red/HNE)* HEAVY METAL

This is bumper seventeen track set includes four previously unreleased live recordings from 1983, rare demos and rehearsal material from a band who may have passed many fans by in the heady days when the NWOBHM was at its peak in the early eighties. The genre's influence spread worldwide, certainly as far as Los Angeles where Michael Henry, Gary and Ray Winslow plus Dave Young were inspired to take up the mantle with August Redmoon.

Unlike their U.S. peers Van Halen and Mötley Crüe, they just had the one official release – the 'Fools Are Never Alone' EP – which contributes the first five tracks and is perhaps the pick of their output. No nonsense, no frills Hard Rock and Metal which is straightforward and uncomplicated both musically and lyrically. You might call it modest as it the likes of 'Fools Are Never Alone' and 'Bump In The Night' offer up stereotypical Metal without really veering off the tried and trusted path and leaving their own trail, while the mix seemingly tends to favour the vocals over the instruments.

Three rehearsal tracks are perhaps expectedly "Lo-Fi" and (again) the uneven mix is something which seems to haunt them. A case of untapped potential which could have been so much more. Three tracks from a demo cassette of an AR side project are of the same ilk; 'Survival Of The Fittest' tapping on an early Rush sound and structure which ups the interest.

Four live tracks complete the picture. Complete with a chant of "Red-moon, Red-moon" (in the style of a "Maid-en" chant) and a "Rawk and Roll" overblown introduction to a fervent crowd, it might be classed as a nice souvenir to look back on but even by the standards of audience recordings from the eighties, it's barely listenable. It wraps up the complete picture, warts and all, showing they had plenty of material at their disposal but the lack of impact of their released EP perhaps didn't justify any further investment.

While the Halens and the Mötleys are still dispensing some form of what they did in their better days and continuing to pull in the crowds (and the dollars) for a healthy dose of nostalgia, whether the August Redmoon's 2013 reformation will generate the same excitement remains to be seen.

Mike Ainscoe

DARK SARAH – 'BEHIND THE BLACK VEIL' *(Inner Wound)* SYMPHONIC METAL

I must say this is the best Symphonic-based music I've heard since Elvellon blew me away back in the spring. It's basically the creation of ex-Amberian Dawn Soprano Heidi Parviainen and the scope, breadth, musicianship and arrangements are a joy to behold.

This is a full-blown concept album that's been several years in the making due to being crowd-funded by Parviainen in three separate stages to maximise its potential and follows the protagonist Sarah who is jilted at the altar by her fiancé. She almost breaks down but sorrow turns to anger and awakens a darkness within her that becomes the evil Dark Sarah. The album follows her struggles between these two personalities.

Although this is technically a new release, the previously released limited edition EP 'Violent Roses' featured the same first eight songs, untouched, in the same order as found here. The featured musicians are current U.D.O. guitarist Kasperi Heikkinen and Wintersun bassist Jukka Koskinen who were both in AD at the same time as Parviainen. Rude Rothsten also plays some bass on the album alongside drummer Teemu Laitinen who played on the first set of songs, and fellow drummer Lauri Kuussalo. Erkka Korhonen (Northern Kings) also plays guitar on the album although they are all effectively session guys as Heidi has since assembled a band of different musicians.

Musically it's full of beautiful melodies and harmonies such as on 'Sun, Moon And Stars' with its dramatic Symphonic elements pervading the lush sonic soundscapes and sweet Operatic Soprano. With the occasional synth beats and loops borrowed from Amaranthe, the musical book of storytelling borrowed from Tuomas Holopainen and Mikko P. Mustonen producing, mixing and arranging all the wonderful orchestration, Parviainen – in combination primarily with Mustonen – has created a body of work that stands up to the best in the genre.

'Violent Roses' itself is reminiscent of Holopainen's 'Scaretale', the superb soaring Soprano duet with ex-Xandria vocalist Manuela Kraller takes 'Memories Fall', arguably the best composition, to another level with its dramatic rise and fall vocal harmonies and orchestration (listen to the bonus orchestral version to get a different take on this masterpiece!) whilst the multi-tracked vocals on 'Evil Roots', another duet with German Inga Scharf of Van Canto fame, creates a big sound dovetailing with the heavy riffing.

There really isn't a bad song on this album with the mournful piano-led ballad 'Hide And Seek' offering a tangible taste of Parviainen's class, the third duet with Sonata Arctica's Tony Kakko 'Light In You' another ballad that builds to a climax and the rather wonderful black humour of bonus song 'A Grim Christmas Story' that is a lovely representation of Parviainen's personality.

If you have the EP and therefore already own the first half of this record, the six new tracks are superb and the CD is class from start to finish. It deserves to be heard!

Carl Buxton

GAMMA RAY – 'HEADING FOR TOMORROW: ANNIVERSARY EDITION' *(earMusic)* POWER METAL

In 1988 Kai Hansen left Helloween just as they were hitting the big time and the shock waves in the Metal Universe were felt around the world. What would happen to him and his old band? Was that it for both parties or was there more to come? The answer was (of course) a resounding yes to the latter. Helloween as we all know carried on and went from strength to strength (recently releasing their sixteenth album) whilst Hansen went on to form Gamma Ray who are about to celebrate their twenty-fifth year in the music business.

For this reason Hansen has gone back into the studio to re-master the whole GR back catalogue, which will all be released as two-disc special edition sets. Each re-issue will contain the original album with some single b-sides on the first disc along with a second that will contain old live recordings, alternative versions and original demos digitalised for the first time, all taken from original tapes that have been saved by the GR band members over the years.

The first in the series to be unveiled is (unsurprisingly) 'Heading For Tomorrow' which some might rightly remember was supposed to be a Hansen solo record rather than a band project; this changed during the recording process and GR was born. When it

ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN – 'DAY AFTER YESTERDAY: AGUA DE ANNIQUE COLLECTED' *(InsideOut)* ROCK

In 2007, after spending the best part of twelve years fronting Dutch Gothic maestros The Gathering, lead singer Anneke van Giersbergen made the shock announcement that she was leaving to pursue a solo career. After six studio albums and a couple of live albums and EP's, it was time for her to explore different musical avenues.

Free from the constraints of TG, van Giersbergen focused her attentions on a new project entitled Agua De Annique in which she spread her wings musically, expanding into different moods and styles that were not possible in her former band.

'Day After Yesterday' includes all four ADA albums with a grand total of fifty-two songs that were originally released individually. 'Air', 'Pure Air', 'In Your Room' and 'Live In Europe' have now been packaged together in one collection featuring full lyrics, photos and extensive liner notes as well as a bonus track 'NotTheMostPrettyGirl' that has been added to 'Air'.

Fifty-two songs may sound like a lot of music to get through, but the strength and consistency of the material is uniformly high and variety of styles covered throughout maintain the interest levels and then there's "that!" voice; van Giersbergen possesses one of the most beautiful voices ever recorded. With such clarity and purity, her sweet tone brings every song to life, whether it's touching ballads like 'Come Wander With Me', the moody 'Beautiful One or the almost Disco romp of 'I Want' and 'Hey Okay', which could almost be Blackmore's Night with its uplifting melody that makes it hard to resist. The ability of this Dutch songstress to take a simple, sparse chord structure and turn it into a thing of shiny beauty shows a real talent and 'Take Care Of Me' is the perfect example of this.

There is some repetition of tracks across the records and that is inevitable with one of the discs being a live album. 'Pure...', the follow-up to 'Air', features a selection of covers and re-worked songs from her first album featuring guests such as Anathema's Danny Cavanagh on 'The Blower's Daughter', Arjen Lucassen on 'Valley Of The Queens' and Sharon den Adel who duets with van Giersbergen on a stunning cover of Within Temptation's 'Somewhere'. These alternative versions make this a worthy companion to its parent album; some covers, which include Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Power Of Love', simply add to the attraction.

Of all the songs on the album, it is perhaps the title track, 'Day After Yesterday' that is most striking. It is featured three times across the four discs and each different with van Giersbergen's, sparse solo arrangement dripping in emotion while the duet with Marike Jager adding a sublime layer of harmony. Whichever version that you choose to play, the spine-tingling melody will leave you mesmerised. This is truly one of the most beautiful songs released in many years and only a heart of stone would fail to be moved by it.

At only fourteen quid for four albums of such high quality from Anneke van Giersbergen's website (and signed to boot), what is there not to like?

Mick Burgess

comes to the re-mastering (which is, after all, one of the main reasons for the re-release campaign) Hansen has done an outstanding job, making the whole album sound and seem vibrant, fresh and bang up to date. The sonic element he has wrung out from these twenty-five year old recordings is amazing to hear and I found myself falling in love with this album all over again.

Songs like 'Lust For Life', 'Space Eater', 'Heaven Can Wait', 'The Silence' etc. all sound like they could have been written and released yesterday. Unusually though for this type of release, Hansen hasn't re-mastered it in his favour, thus making his part sound and seem better and bigger than it was. Instead, he has made sure that each band member, from Ralf Scheepers and Uwe Wessel to Mathias Burchardt, have been given the same audio boost and that all their performances shine like never before.

The accompanying bonus disc contains twelve tracks that include six original demos with Hansen on vocals, two live tracks, a couple of single B-sides and karaoke versions of '...Eater' and '...Tomorrow' plus one instrumental track for good measure. Given that these are demos, don't expect the same sonic quality you find on the re-mastered album because it's not there. Yet I have to admit that Hansen has still done a magnificent job on these bonus tracks, making sure that what you hear is of a highest quality that it can be and that bodes well for what is to come during the rest of this re-issue series.

If you're new to Gamma Ray this is a great way to introduce yourself to their wonderful music. For fans of old it's up to you as to whether you fork out for these albums again. Personally, I am of the opinion that they sound so good that I think a second investment is more than justified.

Ian Johnson

JEFF BECK – 'PERFORMING THIS WEEK... LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S' *(Eagle/Universal)* ROCK

The DVD version of this expanded set came out in 2008 and is one of the very best of its kind, but at long last the previously issued single CD has been expanded to include more highlights of the guitar pioneer's residency at London's famous Jazz mecca. Backed by bassist Tal Wilkenfeld, keyboard player Jason Rebello and the inimitable Vinnie Colaiuta on drums, the original set has been re-arranged so that disc one is exclusively instrumental and is exactly the same as the original release. Jeff Beck standards like The Yardbirds' 'Beck's Bolero', John McLaughlin's 'Eternity's Breath', Billy Cobham's 'Stratus' and the Stevie Wonder classic 'Cause We Ended As Lovers' have been made his own over the years and are performed superbly with skill and emotion. The sixteen song first disc also includes in-house Rock/Fusion classics like 'Led Boots', 'Scatterbrain', 'Space Boogie' and the spellbinding 'Where Were You', all sealing Beck's reputation as the world's best guitar player with an emotional display of power and subtlety.

For those who don't really watch DVD's, this version adds a second disc of all the vocal tracks from those legendary shows, Joss Stone brilliantly taking Rod Stewart's role on 'People Get Ready', Eric Clapton joining in for the Bluesy 'Little Brown Bird' and 'You Need Love' and the unique voice of Imogen Heap for 'Rollin' And Tumblin' and her own evocative 'Blanket'; each one with Beck playing for the song rather than overshadowing his guests. This disc also includes a seven song tribute to Gene Vincent with Rockabilly band The Big Town Playboys on which Beck replicates the clean 1950's sound of the originals. The Aerosmith-approved 'Train Kept A Rollin" is the highlight, but 'Crazy Legs', 'Race With The Devil', 'My Baby Left Me' etc. all benefit from the crystal clear sound that has been skilfully captured.

There's nothing here that wasn't already available on CD, DVD or Blu-ray, but this version adds the DVD and Blu-ray exclusives for those who prefer just the audio. If you only ever buy one Jeff Beck album, this is as good as any.

Phil Ashcroft

KKB – 'GOT TO GET BACK' *(Twenty4)* ROCK

Back in 1974 bassist/singer Mike Katz wrote a collection of songs and teamed up with drummer Guy Bois and guitarist Bruce Kulick (Kiss) to lay them down. Believing the masters lost, thirty-four years would pass before those six songs would see the light of day in 2008 as the limited 'KKB 1974', which featured a straight transfer from the only tape copy Kulick and Katz owned. Another seven years later and by chance Katz rediscovered the masters, allowing Brian Virtue to re-mix and master everything to quite stunning effect. So excited were KKB by the striking end results they were inspired to write and record a new track, which gives this short album its title.

Tellingly 'Got To Get Back' is dedicated to the much missed Cream bassist Jack Bruce and it's the legendary sound he created with Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker which drives much of what KKB produced. Twenty at the time, Kulick displays a real maturity in his style and a fire in his playing which was often deemed lacking/stifled from his early Kiss output – if there was proof of just how underrated a fret monster he is, it's right here. Katz possesses a real warmth, character and energy in his voice, drawing you into the songs, while equally his bass work sings loud and proud and with such a powerful drummer like Bois behind them, KKB were a power trio par excellence.

'I'll Never Take You Back' positively sparks, a gargantuan groove revealing an eye for a hook, yet it's the technical proficiency which really catches the eye as Kulick fires out lightning licks, Bois and Katz matching him all the way. 'Someday', where the trio have retro-fitted strings, possesses a majestic air as layers of vocals soothe alongside beautiful arrangements. And if that wasn't enough, take in the energetic Led Zeppelin meets Cream romp of 'Trying To Find A Way' and early Rush-inspired 'You've Got A Hold On Me' to experience the quality on offer throughout.

The newie, '...Back', opens proceedings and not only do we have to tip our hats to this triumvirate for crafting one of the most memorable songs I've heard all year, but also for the way in which it sounds convincingly current while perfectly fitting its seventies surroundings. Dare I say that with its Zep-edge, there's a suggestion that it would have fitted perfectly on the debut by a certain group of face painted Rockers...

With the quality of the material KKB produced it's amazing they never took this band any further. However, with the new song standing proudly as one of the best on show, we can only hope this reunion isn't as brief as their original time together.

Steven Reid

KAIPA – 'KAIPA'/'INGET NYTT UNDER SOLEN' *(Tempus Fugit)* PROGRESSIVE

My association with Kaipa began when they reunited in 2002 for the 'Notes From The Past' album, some twenty years after their previous studio release 'Nattdjustid'. My interest being sparked by the presence of a certain Roine Stolt who joined the band as a seventeen year old; the band folding after he left to form The Flower Kings, one of my favourite bands. It's not a stretch to see the development of TFK comes from Kaipa.

The two albums on offer here represent re-masters of their eponymous debut from 1975 and the follow-up from the next year. The next five albums are receiving the same treatment and will see the light of day throughout 2015, which for those of us who have been trying to get our hands on the 'Decca Years' box-set for something less than an "exorbitant price" is really great news.

Preconceptions at the ready, I was prepared for something that sounded somewhat dated and "of its time" but I was pleasantly surprised to be proved generally wrong. Like the best Prog from that era, it still sounds vital and relevant today; although there is the odd moment here and there, notably the tracks which I suspect are akin to Swedish Folk songs, where the age of the material seems obvious, but in the main it works rather well. If anything, I prefer this version of the band, as the vocals aren't as shrill as some of those employed in their current guise.

Even the vocals being sung in their native tongue isn't a negative as the underlying melodies carry the song and break the lyrical barrier. Towards the end of the second album, English vocals make an appearance and they're pretty accomplished. One of my favourite tracks is the last of these, 'Blow Hard All Tradewinds' which has all the ingredients of great Prog music.

The band sits firmly at the Symphonic end of the Prog genre and at various times put me in mind of Yes, early Camel, early Genesis and Rick Wakeman but without ever feeling like they are deliberately aping their sound. Some of the acoustic guitar work has that Pink Floyd vibe. The widespread use of Hammond Organ is so redolent of both the Camel and Wakeman comparisons and (at times) Stolt's guitar work touches similar bases to that of Steve Howe.

There are many delightful melodies and refrains across the twenty tracks, with plenty of beautiful instrumental passages to thrill you; any self-respecting fan of TFK will welcome these into their collection. Me, I'm just delighted to have finally got my hands on this music without resorting to a second mortgage.

Gary Marshall

KALEDON – 'CHAPTER IV: TWILIGHT OF THE GODS' *(Scarlet)* POWER METAL

Probably fair to say that whilst Kaledon have never broken into the top tier of Power Metal bands, they are nestling in the heart of many people – just a look at the interest levels amongst our very own Fireworks writers shows that.

They have produced some fine music over the years and continue to do so with a new vocalist, their new album 'Antillus: The Light Of The King' came out last year, but this 2006 album is probably their most well known and it's now being re-released because of its 8th anniversary... or something like that.

Kaledon may indeed be following a big concept (Alex Mele's 'Legend Of The Forgotten Reign') with the lead guitarist pinning Kaledon as a fictional realm and certainly they may have a lot of the signifiers that people looking into this genre could tick off in their 'I Spy – Book Of Power Metal', but they are actually more than that. This album often shows us just how much more.

So the battle sounds are effective as a scene setter, their music utilises tight, tough riffs but they are not afraid to use Peolo Campitelli's keyboard as more than just a twinkling, groaning accessory; here they really trade solos with Mele's soaring six strings, bobbing and weaving through tracks like 'Eyes Of Fire' and 'Goodbye My Friend', rising together and causing all sorts of mayhem, creating a different feel to a lot of other bands.

Likewise 'War Plans', which has the drama that nice Doom can bring but opens out to the duel we love, and 'The Prophecy', which doesn't meddle with the basis of piano and vocals with judicious strings. If 'The Fury' breathes expansive air into a simple balladic sound, it is just so we see how important this music is.

Of course, those who want to go nowhere but to Power town can easily be directed to the rush of the stabbing riffs required; there's also the wildly widdling solo of 'The Holy Water', the mini epic Battle of 'Into The Fog' and choral blur of 'Eyes Of Fire' – this is all excellently delivered, with the verve and triumphalism that is required of effective, blood-stirring music.

Kaledon make you smile, bang your head, raise your fist and yell but also sit and reflect; most of all they enjoy giving us music they are committed to and which they provide with brilliance. Long may this battle rage!

Steve Swift

LOUD AT LEAST – 'DIRTY' *(Massacre)* HARD ROCK

First surfacing a couple of years ago (March 2013), this solid effort from Austrian outfit Loud At Least has now been picked up for Worldwide distribution by Massacre Records. The line-up has stayed pretty much steady since the original recording was launched with Gernot "Gernoo" Schilcher on vocals, Robert "Rob" Einwallner and Andreas "Andy" Doringer on guitars and Gernot "Hardy" Reisner on bass, with "hired gun" Jurgen Kulmer on drums. The name apparently comes from an early promise of the band's mission – "at least it will be loud" – more than that, it's definitely worth a listen.

The comparison with the Scorpions is too easy, but fans of that Teutonic style won't be disappointed. This is similar styled Arena Melodic Metal/Hard Rock, although as admitted by the band themselves, it features several different styles thus giving a more varied feel.

Fast paced, straight down the line Metal tracks, complete with high pitched vocals, are the mainstay including the opener 'Kill The Dragon', 'Burning My Heart', 'Dirty', 'Anything' 'Hell To Fuck' and 'Fire And Ice'; the latter featuring the piercing war cry of "sacrifice" as chorus. Not for the faint hearted! It is all traditional sounding, with some great guitar solos, but without any sense of déjà-vu which is far more difficult to

achieve than it sounds!

Mid-tempo Rock songs that allow Schilcher to show off the rich timbre and versatility of his voice are also included as evidenced by 'The Island I Know' and the excellent 'Love At First Bite'.

On the other end of the scale from the Metal tracks is a love song and one of the best tracks on the album, this is the tender ballad 'Warm Rain' with its catchy, soaring chorus. More ballads can be found in the shape of the eighties sounding 'Heaven Is Calling' and 'Up On Stage'. These contrast the heavier tracks and, since they are more concentrated towards the end of the album, finish it with a mellow note.

There's a Funky, cheeky feel to 'Ride On Me' which stands out on its own somewhat featuring an original and memorable spoken interlude with questions, the answer to which is always the main chorus line "ride on me". This could play well and be a lot of fun with a myriad of possibilities for crowd interaction in a live setting.

The introspective 'I Am' is likely to chime as a battle cry for many a Metal fan. In other words, accept me as I am because I don't come any other way. We love Metal because we were born to it.

Fair play to the band for sticking with this until they got recognition... one which is deserved based on this release.

Dawn Osborne

RAGE – 'NICE 'N' DIRTY', 'RUN FOR THE NIGHT' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

Basically a continuation of Liverpool seventies Rockers Nutz, after falling out and leaving A&M the band signed to French label Carrere (also home to Saxon back then), changed their name and released three albums, each having their own individual sound. 1981's 'Out Of Control' was an album mainly consisting of songs that had been written for what was to be the next Nutz album and, to be honest, just like those Nutz albums it did nothing at all for me.

However, for the follow-up, 1982's 'Nice 'N' Dirty', the band raised their game and quality considerably. Bringing in second guitarist Terry Steers to complement Mick Devonport, the band added extra grit to their songs; these were compositions that also featured far catchier melodies and hook-lines. The opening quartet of 'American Radio Stations', 'Wasted Years', 'Woman' and 'Heartbreaker' was amongst the strongest I'd heard back then – glorious commercial Hard Rock with one eye on America – all wrapped up in the wonderful vocals of Dave Lloyd, the voice of that memorable Cadbury's Flake advert from 1985. The back end of the album does suffer a dip in quality, but by that time the album should already have made an immediate impact.

If 'Nice 'N' Dirty' was the added grit, then 'Run For The Night' was certainly the added gloss, the band bringing in keyboards to great effect. This was especially true on the epic opener 'Cry From A Hill', a stirring, emotional song that sits right up there with Magnum's best, as well as the superlative title track. The band still knew how to Rock though, and also how to write a great riff as the likes of 'Ladykiller' and 'Fantasy' prove in spades, aided by the song-writing expertise of Steve Morris (Export, and currently Heartland, Shadowman etc.) who had been brought in to provide a more commercial slant. The 1970's style Glam of 'Can't Say No' is one of the few false steps on an otherwise excellent album.

It is one of my personal disappointments that Rage never made it bigger and called it a day after this release – they deserved a far wider appreciation, and it is still also a regret that the band didn't manage to put it together to reform at Firefest. For those that have never heard of Rage and their music, check them out on this issue's cover CD, then get over to the Rock Candy website and purchase these two albums pronto. A sad loss to the U.K. Melodic Rock scene but leaving a legacy that is well worth respecting.

Bruce Mee

SPIRITUAL BEGGARS – 'ANOTHER WAY TO SHINE', 'MANTRA III', 'AD ASTRA', 'ON FIRE' *(Music For Nations)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Originally released between 1996 and 2002, these four re-issued albums by one of the most influential and influenced Stoner Rock bands of the early nineties have taken new life thanks to the prompt job of record label Music For Nations. A life that has revitalized itself through the most appropriate format a retro band of this type could ever deserve and ask for. Remember vinyl? Well, that's it. With liner notes by guitarist and founding member Michael Amott along with new artwork by Per Wiberg, each album was released on coloured vinyl (three on LP for the first time) along with a free CD version of the album with bonus tracks.

Spiritual Beggars was the musical creature Amott wanted to form in 1993, after he left Death Metal band Carcass, a musical context definitely different from the extreme style of the Liverpool group. At the same time, a project that would differentiate itself from what was going to become the umpteenth trend promoted by bands like Kyuss, Sleep and Fu Manchu back then in California. Just so, this Swedish/British combo (other members like vocalist Janne "JB" Christoffersson, bassist Sharlee D'Angelo, drummer Ludwig Witt and keyboardist Wiberg were from Sweden) has shunned cheap and restrictive descriptions since from the start, since that Grammy (Sweden) nominated album 'Another Way To Shine, released in 1996.

Even from there, you could clearly hear the intention to ride the wave of that scene was not in these guys' plans at all. The frames of their arrangements were groovy for sure but not forcedly Doomy like in other cases of that era. Back in the day, too many were rummaging into Tony Iommi's repertoire (especially in Sweden – Candlemass for instance) or pushing distortion and saturation over the top. Instead, SB were simply Rocking, Rolling and "Stoning" like Grand Funk Railroad or Mountain would have done. 'Blind Mountain' is a perfect example of that round line of bass messing around with that malicious, fat and silken riff which even Thin Lizzy would have approved. By the way, who could expect a cheeky cowbell for the opening track of a Stoner album? Well, that's just how 'Magic Spell' keeps its tempo, so there's no shame also putting some Blue Oyster Cult in the mix.

If SB were forced to be caged in a genre nomenclature, that was only a matter of comfort by music press and closed-minded listeners. There is nothing so predictable in these albums, especially when Amott delivers his vivid guitar skills in a way that resembles wizards like Michael Schenker or Uli Jon Roth who were maybe his major influences (no wonder Guitar World Magazine ranked him No. 74 out of '100 Greatest Heavy Metal Guitarists Of All Time').

If the cowbell at the beginning of '...Shine' can destabilize, imagine the Bossa Nova that introduces 'Mantra III' (1998), an album with a definitely thicker and crispier production but maybe less instinctive than its predecessor. Yet, the single 'Euphoria' (which this re-issue offers an alternative mix version of) is a monster track with its mammoth-like riff that breaks into the song after more than one minute of lysergic speculation, while 'Broken Morning' is an up-beat tribute to the Jimi Hendrix/Roth legacy. Not to mention the raw brutality of 'Lack Of Prozac'. Another interesting moment is the bonus track, 'The Band Is Playing', with that intriguing Bluesy feeling that can almost make you think of some "Stoned" ZZ Top.

With 'Astra' (2000), the band moved forward in terms of sound and melody as well. In fact, 'Blessed', 'Per Aspera Ad Astra' and 'Angel Of Betrayal' (to name a few) sounded polished and slick like never before, showing the most conservative and melodic side of their nature, that plain 1970's Hard Rock matrix that marked their career from the start. My favourite highlight, 'On Dark Rivers' (a track even a 1980's Hard Rock fan would consider catchy), sounds like a fierce combination of the Michael Schenker Group (Graham Bonnet period) with hints of early Scorpions (the seventies ones, of course) and Budgie. Imagine the pace of 'Steamrock Fever' loosely interpreted by Blue Cheer.

The last part of this re-issue series is 'On Fire' (2002), which ironically is the least fiery of this collection but still a brilliant album that once again comprises all the variety of styles this band is capable of, without making their adductive 1970's vibe fade. 'Black Feathers', for instance, starts like the most primitive Deep Purple but then a sinister and majestic wall of sound ala Cathedral drives the song into an epic resolution. 'Young Man, Old Soul', instead, shows the most impudent but least obvious reference to one of the seventies giants of Hard Rock, Black Sabbath.

Summarily, these four albums can really do justice regarding the position Amott's gang deserves in Rock history, if ever somebody would be in doubt. If you are pretty sick of overproduced releases or readymade songs that last no more than four minutes, then do yourself a favour and re-discover where the roots of Hard 'n' Heavy came from through a group that surely sounds retrospective but massively inspired and with a metaphysical song-writing ability. In addition, you'll enjoy some of the best guitar tones and vibratos your ears could ever experience by the courtesy of Amott, a truly genuine six-string virtuoso.

Enrico Navella

TED NUGENT – 'FREE-FOR-ALL: EXPANDED EDITION' *(Cherry Red/HNE)* HARD ROCK

Eager to capitalise on the success of his first album, released in 1975 and spawning such classics as 'Stranglehold', 'Just What The Doctor Ordered' and 'Hey Baby', Ted Nugent returned a year later with 'Free-For-All'. With just his second album under his own name, the Motor City Madman enjoyed platinum sales… but it came at a price.

Nugent had employed the distinctive vocalist and rhythm guitarist Derek St Holmes to share lead vocal duties with, but after the first album, the pair ended up colliding over that old chestnut "creative differences". The basic gist was whether the group of musicians, which saw Nugent and St Holmes paired up with drummer Cliff Davies and bass player Rob Grange, should be seen as a band or whether the spotlight should fall solely on the lead guitarist. When St Holmes decided "Nuge's way or the highway" was not for him, he left the band, leaving Nugent with some big shoes to fill.

The album itself had plenty to shout about, with classic Nuge songs such as the title track and 'Dog Eat Dog' on offer. Nugent was perfectly happy to step up to the microphone and handle some of the songs himself, and one track still featured the distinctive voice of St Holmes, which was the awesome Rock effort 'Turn It Up'. However, Nugent felt a different voice was needed to complete the picture.

Enter Marvin Lee Aday, a vocalist not particularly well known at the time, but that would soon change. Now known the world over as Meatloaf, he stepped up to deliver five tracks including 'Writing On The Wall', 'Street Rats' and 'Hammerdown'.

The original album sounds great, and there are three bonus tracks… although if you own the 1999 re-issue, don't get excited, as they as the same three that appeared all those years ago – live versions of 'Free-For-All' and '…Dog', along with an alternate take of '…Rats' with St Holmes on vocals, which I personally think is far better than the Meatloaf version. The only thing that is new is the inlay booklet, which has been revamped with pictures and a Malcolm Dome penned essay taken from interviews with Meatloaf, Grange and Nugent himself.

The material here is typical of the sort of thing Nugent is famous for – high octane playing, searing solos, memorable riffs and bags of energy. If you have the 1999 re-issue, than this version is pointless unless you really want to fork out for the superior booklet. If you like Nugent and don't own the album, then you really need to address that and this is the perfect release to do it.

James Gaden

THE ZILLA PROJECT – 'THIS ONE'S FOR THE PRESIDENT' *(Independent)* BLUES/SOUL

If someone were to ask you who your favourite Cypriot Blues band was, you might struggle for an answer, but now you can tell them The Zilla Project is a Blues band to track down. This is a polished disc and if it had come from the States, people would be making a bit of noise about it. It is worth noting that this album originally came out in Greece in May 2014 but is now getting its U.K. release in September this year.

There's a mixture of self-penned numbers and choice covers. Those covers, such as Son House's classic 'Death Letter' and Janis Joplin's 'Mercedes Benz', are tackled confidently and in their own way to make them sound like Zilla originals. There's a good variety to their sound in general across the tracks; there's the great slide work on '... Letter', the piano tinkling on 'Mr Tumblin" and the Country Rockin' on '...Benz' plus a lot of Bluesy Rock.

Those Rockier tracks have diversity between them also with the wailing guitar on 'Can't Let You Go', some space to stretch out and explore on the seven minute 'Zilla Song' and some Hard Rocking on 'Grace' that builds to some meaty Bad Company power chords. Manolis "Big Mo" Vourakis' vocals are good and have a slight Chris Rea feel to them especially on 'Hear Me Crying'.

The band have been playing clubs and festivals across their home country and they definitely should be the "go to" support band for any international Blues artists playing Cyprus. Further proof, if it were ever needed, that it doesn't matter where the Blues comes from – be it the Mississippi Delta, 1960's Britain or modern day Cyprus – its emotional connection is universal.

Duncan Jamieson

SHORT - SHARP - SHOTS OF - ROCK!

Steven Reid takes a look at new EP releases

It's time for another selection of releases we lovingly refer to as diminutive, pointy, nips of boulders (or something like that…), where genres collide and bands boast of the smallness of their offerings… so let's get on.

The 'From The Flames' album announced Northern Irish upstarts **SCREAMING EAGLES** in amazing style back in 2013. With album number two, 'Stand Up And Be Counted' (reviewed in the New Release section) on the horizon, here we have the rather excellent lead-off EP, 'SAVE ME'. The title track to this release is a scything burst of uncompromising Classic Rock with strong nods to AC/DC; guitars a powering strut and hooks refusing to release their grip. Four debut album tracks ('Rock & Roll Soul', 'Hungry For More', 'Down The River' and 'Blood') are presented from the band's 2014 set at Hard Rock Hell, with a decent run-through of Led Zeppelin's 'Immigrant Song' thrown in for good measure. However upstaging the lot is a blistering cover of the Easybeats (and INXS/Jimmy Barnes) hit 'Good Times', with guest vocals from Bonafide singer Pontus Snibb. Remember the name SE, for this is a cracking release and '...Counted' is even better!

Describing themselves as "Deathy, Thrashy stuff", Northern Ireland's (yes, we're still across the water) **CURSED SUN** are far from the "all out aggro" that they describe themselves as. Yes, singer Andrew "Jones" Cassidy is a growler but he's also a singer, while the twin guitar assault leaves a decidedly Melodic Progressive Metal flavour. Of those three words, it's the Metal which forms the strongest basis for 'The Seven' and 'Ascension', although the vicious intricacies contained in 'Psychopath' and 'The Last Rites' confirm this lot have wide, varied and decidedly Progressive sensibilities. With three EPs and a full album under their belt, 'THE FALL AND RISE' finds CS on the up.

The first in a number of releases and shows set to commemorate the 30th (!) year of **GALAHAD**, the simply titled '30' is a limited teaser EP from the forthcoming 'When Worlds Collide' retrospective. Featuring four vintage but newly re-recorded tracks this – as you'd expect – thirty minute long release dances from early Neo-Prog to heartfelt piano-led balladry and so much more in-between. Featuring rejuvenated versions of 'The Chase', 'Chambers Of Horrors', 'Dreaming From The Inside' and 'Room 801', '30' is a superb taste of what's been and what's still to come from one of the U.K.'s best – and still at the top of their game – bands of the last three decades.

Landing on the melodic side of Mallory Knox or Lower Than Atlantis, Berkshire-based **ELASEA** have declared 'WHERE I BELONG'. Humble beginnings as a covers band quickly evolved into a following for their self-penned and popular YouTube videos and now we have this pulsatingly persuasive debut five tracker. The aggressive vocals are kept to a minimum, only 'Time Is Against Us' revelling in some throaty expulsions, however even here the melodies, clean vocals and bright guitars rule the roost. The U.K. may well be overflowing with bands of this ilk right now but Elasea prove that when it's done well, it can still make a lasting mark.

Featuring the shred talents of Gabriel Guardian (well, he says that's his name, who am I to argue?), **IMMORTAL GUARDIAN** could easily have tumbled into the "speed over all else" trap. However taking a more Power with a soupçon of synth approach 'REVOLUTION PART I' finds a pounding punch of anthems and virtuosity. In truth, his chosen genre is hardly shy in producing instrumental technicians keen to show their capabilities, so the double G is in good company as he Iron Maiden-gallops into 'Victory Shore' and shreds intensely across 'Immortal', which also features legendary producer Roy Z. If you're worried IG are exclusively a six-string-extravaganza, then just listen to the ferocity of Cody Gillard's drums, Thad Stevens' bass and Guardian's superb keyboards. Then factor in the soaring, swooping vocals from Carlos Zema (Outworld) and suddenly it's time to take note. Hopefully we get a full album soon; if we do we could have a new major player in the Technical Power Metal market.

Two tracks from the **GRAHAM BONNET BAND** prove beyond doubt that the Rainbow, Alcatrazz, MSG man still has it, as 'MY KINGDOM COME' (written by Russ Ballard) surges with a keen mix of Melodic Rock smoothness and Symphonic goodness. Not quite as vocally adventurous as he once was, this track, and the grittier but no less convincing 'The Mirror Lies', finds Bonnet in impressive form. The high notes may not quite have the authority they once did, but the full-throated roar that's always been Bonnet's calling card is still strongly in evidence. If this is what we can expect from the legendary singer and his new line-up (Beth-Ami Heavenstone, Conrado Pesinato and Chase Manhattan), it could potentially be his best outing under any guise for many a year.

MARC VANDERBERG is a new name on the scene and yet here he is with a four track EP, 'THE FOUR ELEMENTS', which features a guest vocal from none other than Goran Edman. However it's tough to get too carried away with the straight up 'Devil May Care' where Edman does what he does amidst a muddy sound and some rather expected twists and turns. Although unexpectedly, 'Key To Your Heart' borrows the Hammond Organ from Europe's 'Superstitious' as vocalist Paulo Cuevas adds a little more dimension. Vanderberg is a talented guitarist who knows his way round a riff and is no stranger to a solo; something best illustrated on 'Corrosion Of Society'. Yet there's a distinct feel that to really hit home, some less tried and tested ideas are a must. Fans of Classic Rock will find much to enjoy, however to suggest that '...Elements' is a release ready to mix it with the genre's big boys would be a stretch of the imagination not yet shown on the songs it contains.

Their third release finds Pennsylvania's **ON TOP** going 'TOPLESS'. It also finds them hammering out a solid smack of good ol' 1980's Sunset Strip Hard Rock. The vocals have a Punky sneer and the production brings the vintage sound bang up to date as 'Got Me Running' brings a ramshackle Sleaziness to 'Lie To Me', while '282' brings a far harder push of guitars to the party. It's an accomplished blend and one that seems able to stand OT near the peak of new bands coming through and making this style their own. They maybe aren't groundbreaking, but OT sure are ground shaking.

I'm not sure it was wise to add 'SEX TAPE' from **DAXX & ROXANE** to the top of my bookmarks. However, the derisory looks from my decidedly better half have been worth it for the up-tempo AC/DC gone Party of 'Ticket To Rock'. More an ode to 'AC/DC meets Status Quo via Mötley Crüe, 'Hard Rockin' Man' keeps up the rough but ready vibe, as the guitars roar and attitude over precision vocals from Cédric Pfister soar. Interestingly 'Back Door Man' reveals, through its harmonica shuffle, a more directly Bluesy air where this Swiss four-piece illustrates a different side to their influences. There's still some fine touches to be added to take the unconventionally named D&R from knockabout fun to essential listening, however the early signs are that this '...Tape' could well go viral (no, not like that you mucky lot).

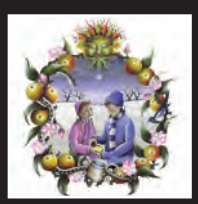
Adding a Funky edge to their bristling Classic Rock, Devon trio **EMPIRE OF FOOLS** are set to go 'HIGHER'. Mighty rifferama abounds on the gritty 'Devil Inside', while 'Down To Earth' and the title track offer even more bounce for your buck. The slow melodic 'Dirty Mind' has a hint of Red Hot Chilli Peppers about it, but without the annoying smartypantsness – and there's a tasty guitar solo to boot – while the slow build of 'Hope' offers up plenty reasons for lofty expectations. Add in the expertly subtle pummel of 'Unstoppable' and that's exactly what EOF may become.

Reading up on **MOTHER MISERY**, there's much talk of Stoner and the like. However with 'DEADICATION' this outfit hit with more Hard Rock bite than expected. There are Modern elements thrown in for good measure but with John Hermansen hitting as though he's a low register Rob Halford mixed with Blaze Bayley, it's often Trad Metal roots which appear. Whatever you want to call it, the controlled guitar work of 'Scars' and energetic surge of 'Killing Me' leave you in little doubt of MM's worth. Four more tracks confirm the class on show; 'Never Again' bulging with confidence and 'If Only I Had Known' slowing things down with a real sense of purpose. I can't tell you what MM were, but what I can say from this is that they are a serious Hard Rocking force with a mighty slam of Metal behind them.

The work rate from **ORCHID** shows no sign of slowing, over six years having now produced five EPs, two full-lengthers and a compilation. The method is simple and remains resolute; take Black Sabbath ideals, sprinkle on some Jimi Hendrix and keep the production sharp, not Sludgy. It works superbly well; 'John The Tiger' swaggering and intense whereas 'Helicopters' is a blast of full-force, old-school Metal infused with the Blues. Theo Mindell's vocals somehow feel threatening and welcoming, yet he never seems to need to force the matter or over egg his delivery. In essence, it's this simple but effective approach which continually wins out on 'SIGN OF THE WITCH' and continues to make an endearing mark the more you hear it.

With **POSSESSOR** described as "Sludge Lords", I immediately marked them down as "not for Fireworks". How wrong I was! Bringing a more U.S. edge to Sabbath via Electric Wizard, Motörhead or even Kylesa, this lot understand the power of the riff. That they also live by the seductive ways of melody makes them all the more palatable. Surprisingly, this high-speed grind arrives from the U.K., guitarist Graham Bywater a powerhouse of controlled fury whilst bassist Marc Brereton adds hugely to the focused attack. Possessor also know how to mix it up, closing number 'Lights Out/Crypt Of The Sorcerer' almost smashing Motörhead into Hawkwind with stunningly spaced-out effect. Much else on show revolves around riff-tastic majesty, making 'STAY DEAD' very lively indeed.

The name **BIG BIG TRAIN** begs a question – "why aren't this band as huge as their name suggests?" 'WASSAIL' (a traditional English ritual carried out to ensure a good harvest of cider apples) could be viewed as nothing more than a stop-gap between the 2012/13 'English Electric' opuses and the 'Folklore' album due next year. However with three new tracks (two of which are exclusives) and a live in the studio re-working of 'Master James Of St. George', this is no makeweight release. 'Wassail' itself is BBT at their best; the pastoral Prog blended with 'So!' era Peter Gabriel in a hugely memorable and irresistible manner. 'Lost Rivers Of London' is less bullish, yet no less seductive, while the mainly instrumental 'Mudlark' allows a line-up now including members of Spock's Beard, Beardfish, XTC and Stackridge, alongside the longstanding Greg Spawton, Andy Poole, David Longdon and Danny Manners to seriously flex their musical muscles. BBT are undoubtedly as good as U.K. Prog gets and 'Wassail' easily lives up to that billing.



MULTIMEDIA

DRAGONFORCE – 'IN THE LINE OF FIRE' *(earMUSIC)* POWER METAL

When this was presented to me for review it made me realize that I haven't actually listened to anything from Dragonforce for bloody ages. Although never a rabid fan, I have always enjoyed their frenetic widdling, mainly because they do it with such joy and vigour, not to mention talent.

This is the first release with new drummer Gee Anzalone and it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that he does a sterling job at the back. In front of him (and the rest of the band) are a hoard of Japanese fans having a whale of a time and it's plain to see that Dragonforce have indeed come through the fire and the flames and are merrily carrying on.

There's only ten tracks here (eleven on the CD), the concert being a second stage festival headliner (the Ultimate Stage at 2014's Loud Park Festival in Tokyo) rather than a "proper" tour show. The set-list is impeccable; a nice inclusion being 2003's 'Black Winter Night' and of course they play 'Through The Fire And Flames' to the ecstatic delight of many fans. I know Guitar Hero meant the song was overplayed, but it's still a brilliant piece of music. The whole thing is so upbeat, melodic and joyous that I loved every minute and the band are tight as a gnat's arse throughout. It seriously made me want to get right back into Dragonforce and that means they did a good job.

The downside with this is that the set is interspersed with documentary footage of what the band got up to during their time off in Japan. Now I have nothing against documentaries, but when it interrupts the concert it's a total pain in the ass. Bowling For Soup did the same thing on their live U.K. DVD ('Live And Very Attractive') and it was shit then as well. The sensible option would have been to put the footage together as a DVD extra, or at least made it an option when watching the concert. Instead, it's just there and whoever made that decision needs a kick up the arse.

Aside from that it's brilliant, but you have been warned – at least the accompanying CD is documentary free.

Alan Holloway

EDENBRIDGE – 'A DECADE AND A HALF...THE HISTORY SO FAR' *(SPV)* SYMPHONIC METAL

The names of vocalist Sabine Edelsbacher and guitarist/keyboardist Lanvall should be well-known to readers of Fireworks as the creative strength behind the Austrian band Edenbridge. Formed in 1998, they have been the constant force behind the wonderfully enthralling Symphonic Metal fare released by the band across eight studio albums, two live releases and one compilation (this being issued in 2007). This massive six DVD release with about nine hours of material now seeks to put the history of the band into perspective, going right back to the beginning including to their pre-Edenbridge band Cascade but also bringing the story right up to the present.

Three multi-cam live concerts are included (from 2004, 2007 and 2014) in addition to interviews (including input from the third original band founder Kurt Bednarsky and former second guitarist Andy Eibler), videos, making of videos and documentaries – all of this in chronological sequence across the discs. The surround sound is good, and the items (including old concert footages, archive material) that have been transferred from non-digital sources has been painstakingly accomplished by Lanvall to a pleasingly high standard.

Space consideration precludes a disc by disc review but if you seek full details of the contents before making a purchase, I recommend going and having a look at the Discogs website (www.discogs.com). Before finishing my comments, I should, I suppose, mention the one disappointing aspect of the package which is a four panel fold out digi-pack. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that of course, as Therion's marvellous 'Celebrators Of Becoming' six DVD release from a few years ago was similar. However, that one kept everything nicely packaged inside a slipcase and I do feel that Edenbridge have missed a trick in not doing similarly with their release.

However, if you are a fan of the band (as I certainly am) then wishing to own this is really a no brainer and it is the wealth of fantastic material on the six DVDs that will draw you in to needing this without question! It is, after all, quite wonderful!

Dave Scott

LYNYRD SKYNYRD – 'ONE MORE FOR THE FANS' *(earMUSIC)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

The second (2)CD/(2)DVD release this issue by the Southern Hard Rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd is the 40th Anniversary Concert that was recorded at the historic Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia with a whole host of guests celebrating the music of the band. The title 'One More For The Fans' was inspired by the 'One More For The Road' live album recorded at the same venue back in 1976.

Keith Wortman, working alongside executive producers Ross Schilling and Ken Levitan, put the unique concert event together. Don Was on bass was the musical director for the evening, with an All-Star band of Michael Beardon on keyboards, Sonny Emory on drums, Audley Freed and George Marinelli on guitars, Jimmy Hall on harmonica and backing vocals, Jason Mingledorff on saxophone, Bobby Campo on trumpet, Mark Mullins on trombone, and sisters Ann, Freda and Regina McCrary on backing vocals. The guests appearing on this extraordinary evening were both young and old and from several genres including Americana, Country and Classic Rock.

Shot in high definition the DVD is superb and the sound quality is exceptional (the same goes for the audio discs). The DVD clocks in at one hour forty-two minutes and has been superbly edited, as I believe that the actual show ran in excess of four hours.

Country star Randy Houser gets the party started with 'Whiskey Rock A Roller' before pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph & Southern Rocker Jimmy Hall continue the show with a great, Funked-up version of 'You Got That Right'. The brass section adds to all the performances and none more so than during the splendid version of 'Saturday Night Special' by Staind lead vocalist Aaron Lewis who sings the song as if he had been doing so all his life.

Announcing "it's great to be home", Southern Rock band of the moment Blackberry Smoke take on the Skynyrd classic 'Workin' For MCA' and deliver a faultless performance that clearly goes down well with the capacity crowd.

Young Rock band O.A.R. offer up their own take on 'Don't Ask Me No Questions' but are completely overshadowed by the fantastic Cheap Trick with their sensational version of 'Gimme Back My Bullets'. Shrewdly, the pace then drops with moe. & John Hiatt performing 'The Ballad of Curtis Loew'.

Gov't Mule pay homage with a spine-chilling rendition of one of my personal favourite Skynyrd tracks 'Simple Man', with The Allman Brothers guitarist, Warren Haynes, remaining on stage for 'That Smell', another real highlight.

Country star Jamey Johnson gives his version of 'Four Walls of Raiford' before Jason Isbell picks up the pace once again with a Rockabilly interpretation of 'I Know A Little'. Peter Frampton doing the JJ Cale standard (that Skynyrd have adopted as their own) 'Call Me The Breeze' is simply magnificent whilst Trace Adkins puts his Country tones to the foot-tapping 'What's Your Name'.

'Down South Jukin" receives a Country/Southern Rock mix with a duet featuring Charlie Daniels and .38 Special lead singer Donnie Van Zant (brother of Johnny and the late Ronnie). The entertaining 'Gimme Three Steps' shows up courtesy of Southern Rock band Alabama whilst 'Tuesday's Gone', with the unmistakeable voice of Gregg Allman, is another main highlight. Although both proud and humble, in equal measures, by all the evening's performers taking part, Allman was the one that the band themselves seemed most overwhelmed with.

The biggest cheer of the night, unsurprisingly, was reserved for the arrival of the main band themselves who open with 'Travelin' Man' that features an emotional duet with Johnny Van Zant and his much missed brother Ronnie Van Zant on the big screen. Images of the sadly departed ex-members of LS, and there have been a few, were displayed on the big screen, during the outstanding version of the seminal 'Free Bird' with Ricky Medlocke, Mark "Sparky" Matejka and Gary Rossington (only surviving original member still in the band) soloing like their lives depend on it.

There is a brief commentary by several of the guests, paying tribute to the band, before the concert is wrapped up with the whole, star-studded, cast on stage performing the classic 'Sweet Home Alabama'.

This is certainly one of those concerts that you would brag about being there if you had been that fortunate, however, the rest of us Lynyrd Skynyrd fans at least have this exceptional recording of the event. Essential for all fans of these Southern Hard Rock legends.

Mark Donnelly

SUPERTRAMP – 'LIVE IN PARIS '79' *(Universal/Eagle Vision)* PROGRESSIVE

Thinking to myself "I know this song... wait a second, that's Supertramp" happened several times when I was younger. I've always found it amazing how many famous songs have their source in the masterminds Roger Hodgson and Rick Davies. These days it has become rather quiet around the band, especially after the end of the original line-up in 1983 and the split-up of the band in 1988. Even after re-uniting ten years later (without Hodgson), Supertramp remained rather subsurface.

And so did a fantastic relict of their ten month-long 'Breakfast In America' tour; a 16mm-film that carried the moving pictures of one of their four shows that were played at the Pavillon de Paris. It was found in a cowshed of drummer Bob Siebenberg by chance after it had been declared as "lost" for a long time. The audio material of the concert had been released in shape of their live double album ('Paris') in 1980 but the video remained unseen until 2012, when 'Live In Paris '79' was first released as Blu-ray/DVD. Now we are presented with the entire concert in full as double CD (superbly re-mastered by Peter Henderson and Supertramp's sound engineer Russel Pope) and that aforementioned DVD in one complete box-set.

Visually, it is packaged in a simplistic but beautifully designed double-folded, cardboard box with an inlay booklet that gives a great (and long!) insight into the band-member's heads during the time of '...America' (by Phil Alexander).

The first audio disc starts with the magnificent sound of a highly enthusiastic crowd and the distinctive harmonica intro of 'School'. An impressive sound and mix resounds from the speakers. During the concert the entire 'Crime Of The Century' album (apart from 'If Everyone Was Listening') was played and '...America' was introduced with three songs, so literally one classical hit chases another. It is a joy for your ears and hearts.

But then there's the DVD... and folks, this is a gem! It starts with a nice history lesson around the show until a Charlie Chaplin double takes you on a mini-trip through Paris, including a pre-show-drink, "sightseeing" and making his way to the Pavillon. Whoever expects this to be a full Hi-Def optical spectacle will surely be disappointed. Remember, the footage was restored from a 16mm-film that was rescued from a cowshed... the colours are rather pale, some shots are out of focus or slightly blurred and the noise is definitely visible. For me personally, that's character; not bad at all and a true product of the late seventies. The sound, however, is fantastic and so I got soaked into the DVD portion immediately. The cameras managed to capture a wonderful bunch of musicians at their best. Rather introverted people, concentrating on their instruments and singing/playing every single note with so much passion. There isn't much action, neither in the way the film was edited and cut, nor in how the band interacts on the rather massive stage (occupied by Siebenberg's huge drum-set and John Helliwell's numerous woodwinds).

Close-ups of Davies singing 'Bloody Well Right' with his unique and powerful voice, Dougie Thomson hammering on his bass and Helliwell interacting with the audience in the most sweet way are just great to watch, especially as the effectively inserted split-screen feature that is used shows the two singers alternating vocal-lines. Apart from that there were only little efforts regarding visual show entertainment elements. The first of these is during the piano-solo and ending of 'Rudy'; we can see a train on full-speed running down the tracks, while pictures of the band were integrated half transparent.

Secondly, as 'Asylum' starts, it was obviously time to go nuts since a dancing gorilla and a banana (no, I'm not fooling you...) are entertaining the eight thousand people in the audience. A small choir supports the five-piece during 'Hide In Your Shell' and appears again in 'Fool's Overture', together with Chaplin, a clown and some other figures while Helliwell is conducting. It all accumulates in "goose-bumps alert" when the biographies of the members are displayed whilst 'Crime Of The Century' is played and a very happy Chaplin is heading off home after the credits appear during 'From Now On'.

The bonus tracks, which include 'Ain't Nobody But Me' and 'A Soap Box Opera', are nothing really special and they all appeared on the original Blu-ray release. Although the sound has been re-mixed, there is no actual footage but a good solution has been found using video montages and computer-animations that nicely compensate for the lack of visual material.

As mentioned before, this release is a wonderful memento of a historical band and concert. Cherish the originality and ingenuity of Supertramp while delving into this amazingly recovered film – and audio material – and share a smile when you (possibly) drift back on your first time thinking "wow... that's Supertramp?!".

Julia Braun

THE WHO – 'LIVE AT SHEA STADIUM 1982' *(Eagle/Universal)* ROCK

By 1982 The Who had struggled on through two poorly received post-Keith Moon albums. Along with being wrecked by addictions and differing personalities, the changing face of music had left them firmly stuck in the past. This was to be their grand farewell… or so we thought at the time!

It's clear watching this DVD that so much of the legendary turmoil and energy that had enthused TW in their live presentations was missing by this point. Kenny Jones could never compete with Moon in personality or his sonic onslaught; in fact singer Roger Daltrey famously claimed he could no longer dance to the rhythm of the drums like he had done with Moon! However, even the worst show was better than most of their competition and there is still much to enjoy here.

Bassist John Entwistle and Daltrey are both dressed in suits, the latter in gold with cropped blonde hair looking more like a young Billy Fury. Guitarist Pete Townshend appears very much a product of the eighties decked out in a leather box jacket and striped bottoms as he jumps around the stage, throwing windmills around his guitar. Jones, relegated to little more than hired gun behind these three legends, still plays his heart out. The sound is presented in DTS and 5.1 surround sound but the picture quality (at times) bleeds into the colours, which is common for many shows filmed during the eighties.

The set-list is impressive; 'Substitute', 'Can't Explain' and 'Who Are You' are all there alongside lesser know songs like 'The Punk And The Godfather', 'Dangerous' and 'The Quiet One' (featuring Entwistle on vocals). The track selection clearly reminds us how TW were never content to rely on hits alone, though the omission of 'My Generation' is a puzzler. It is however added within the five bonus tracks on this release, filmed from another night of the tour.

At times, Daltrey's voice sounds weak, especially during '...Godfather', and Townshend has the usual look of discontent as he sings just the intro to 'I'm One'. If it were not for Entwistle's incredible bass playing, you might forget he's there as the camera rarely fixes on him throughout the concert. The size of the Shea Stadium, unfortunately, distances the band too far from their audience, and it is only when too much pushing at the front alerts Daltrey to the crowd that you feel any connection between them.

Some of the highlights for me are 'Baba O'Riley' and 'Love Reign O'er Me', along with Townshend taking lead vocals for 'Eminence Front'. Visually, there are some lovely distanced shots of the band playing under a giant letter 'H' of their iconic logo. Finishing on a medley of early Beatles material, in honour of The Fab Four, didn't really work me – it is not as if they were short of their own material!

Not the best show you will see from The Who, but still a wonderful live document of one of England's greatest Rock bands.

Ray Paul

YES – 'LIKE IT IS: AT THE MESA ARTS CENTER' *(Frontiers)* PROGRESSIVE

Yes was my first love as a (Progressive) Rock band when I discovered them almost thirty-five years ago and Chris Squire immediately became, and will always remain, my favourite bass player. When I heard that he had passed away a few weeks ago after a very short illness, I was devastated and, if I am truthful, I am still coming to terms with the fact that the world has lost such an innovative and imposing musician. This live 2CD/DVD set was recorded in Phoenix (Squire's home city for the last few years) in August last year and what we get is full album renditions of two Prog classics in 'Close To The Edge' and 'Fragile'.

The live sound is clear and well produced. Steve Howe effortlessly switches from acoustic to lead to steel guitar on 1972's title track 'Closer To The Edge'. Geoff Downes competently covers the keyboard parts (however he is no Rick Wakeman) and Squire's bass booms out of the speakers in all the right places. Jon Davison sounds like Jon Anderson but also adds his own stamp whilst Howe and Squire's harmony vocals complement his performance. 'And You And I' has plenty of steel guitar from Howe and it is played beautifully by the band. The last of the three tracks on the first half, 'Siberian Khatru', comes across powerfully with Howe in particular shining. The band deservedly receives a standing ovation at the end of the song and first of the two albums.

'Roundabout' kicks of the part two as the band head off into 1971's 'Fragile' and the Arizona locals are on their feet having a boogie! Downes dons a pair of spectacles during 'Cans And Brahms' so that he can read the music on his laptop. To be fair, this is a complex piece and there aren't too many keyboardists who would be able to perform Wakeman's solo and Downes does an admirable job. 'We Have Heaven' has very clever harmonies with Davison also playing acoustic guitar and the following 'South Side Of The Sky' is atmospheric and in parts haunting; here we see the band in full flow and even drummer Alan White springs to life. 'Five Per Cent For Nothing' was originally Bill Bruford's solo contribution on 'Fragile' and it is another complex piece; unfortunately it does not transfer across very well live. 'Long Distance Runaround' on the other hand sounds fresh and vibrant with solo flurries from Howe and Squire and this neatly runs into Squire's signature tune 'The Fish (Schindleria Praematurus)'. Again we have great harmony vocals and the big man plays his bass as if he was on lead guitar – what a star... and it receives another well-deserved standing ovation. 'Heart Of The Sunrise' majestically completes the show and finally we have some decent lighting (why didn't they ask Roger Dean to design the stage set?). If I have one minor quibble, why not include the songs that made up the full show as bonus tracks?

But that aside, this is more than likely the last live show that was recorded for release featuring Squire and is a fine performance/legacy for the man who co-formed Yes in 1968 and played on every album. On a personal note, I want to close by saying a huge public thank you to Chris Squire for providing us with almost fifty years of awesome music and memories which will live on forever.

Az Chaudhry

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BOOKMARK

Rob McKenzie provides an overview of essential reading for music lovers everywhere

There is no let-up in the number and quality of books being produced, both printed and electronic. This issue covers an eclectic bunch and I can assure you there are more equally interesting titles due later this year.

'AC/DC FAQ'
SUSAN MASINO *(Backbeat Books)*

The Backbeat Books FAQ series has now added a very obvious instalment – one about AC/DC, probably the biggest Rock band in the business. The book follows the format of previous FAQs, i.e. bitesize chapters on various aspects of the band. As it is not a standard biography, it is possible to dive in anywhere in the book.

As for contents, the pre-fame story of the band is covered with stories of both the Young Brothers and Bon Scott arriving in Australia in their childhood. I did learn that the name Bon was because he was spotted as outsider in his new Australian school and so hailed from "Bonnie Scotland", I doubt if Scott was teased for too long. For that matter, the fighting prowess of the band members is mentioned which is a first for me. Although small in stature, it was clear that Malcolm Young was not one to mess with!

A comprehensive rundown of all AC/DC's albums is given and each song from the albums is given a mention and a titbit of information (e.g. the 'Thunderstruck' title was based on a comment from an air steward when asked if a noise outside the aircraft was lightning – no, it was a thunderstrike!).

On a more domestic note, the book tells of the various hobbies of the band members, notably Angus Young being an accomplished artist and Brian Johnson being interested in all things related to cars. The book is very much up to date and covers the current 'Rock Or Bust' album and the prelude to the ongoing Phil Rudd saga.

With the world tour a recent memory, this is a good book to learn about AC/DC, described by the book as "the world's true Rock 'n' Roll band".

'COBAIN: MONTAGE OF HECK'
BRETT MORGEN WITH RICHARD BIENSTOCK *(Omnibus Press)*

This highly illustrated book is the companion to the documentary film about Kurt Cobain entitled 'Montage Of Heck'. The book comprises interviews with Cobain's nearest and dearest, illustrations and also animation stills of Cobain's life. So, the book provides a one-stop shop of soundbites from Cobain's parents, sisters, wife and Krist Novoselic from Nirvana.

Art in all formats was a key aspect of Cobain's life and the book contains many fascinating examples of his drawings and paintings as well as the more curious alterations to toy animals – all in the name of art. As for revelations, I guess it has mainly been told before but having layer upon layer of views and recollections from first hand sources gives a good three dimensional view of Cobain.

The book is about half text, half photos/illustrations and so is an easy read; it moves on a pace so just as you get to the chapter where Nirvana becomes stellar, before you know it, the developments prior to Cobain's suicide are laid out. The latter being a well-known and depressing chapter of Rock history; interestingly Novoselic quoted a fair bit whereas Dave Grohl does not contribute to the book.

Another worthwhile volume to add to the legacy of Cobain and Nirvana.

'DAVID BOWIE: THE MUSIC AND THE CHANGES'
DAVID BUCKLEY *(Omnibus Press)*

Revised and re-issued following the 1996 original, David Buckley has brought this guide to David Bowie's albums up to date and so concludes (for now?) with 2013's 'The Next Day'. Commencing with a colourful timeline of Bowie's career which puts his work in context, the book simply goes through album by album with a piece on each and every song.

The book is a detailed chronology of Bowie's extensive career and also contains details on the various compilations, thereby providing information for both ardent and casual fans. Towards the end is a chapter on the collaborations Bowie has had – Lou Reed, Mott The Hoople we all know about, but he also worked with a wider range of performers from Lulu to Placebo.

As for the information contained within, aficionados may well know a lot of it already but the book's strength is that it is well laid out, complete and a one-stop shop regarding the David Bowie canon.

'THE GIBSON LES PAUL'
DAVE HUNTER *(Voyageur Books)*

Dave Hunter has produced a follow-up to his series of books about classic guitars with one about the Gibson Les Paul. Along with the Stratocaster, this guitar has defined Rock music and its history is such that one built between 1958 and 1960 could fetch $100,000s even if they have no "name" associated with it. Ones which do such as the lost Clapton "Beano" guitar would be priceless (for example Pete Green's then Gary Moore's Les Paul recently went for $2 million).

The book starts at the beginning with the story of Gibson guitars and the guitarist Les Paul's drive to create a solid body electric guitar - which would eventually become the Gibson Les Paul. The book is largely pictorial so the text is not heavy going and tells of bizarre situation that by 1960 the Les Paul sales were not good; the world was going a bit Sci-Fi at this stage and looking to futuristic shapes such as the Flying V, the Stratocaster (by Fender) and a variant of the Les Paul, slimmer with a double cutaway which was called the SG.

The SG sold well and became a Rocker's guitar as exemplified by Tony Iommi and Angus Young. The book includes quite a few pictures of this guitar and it was nice to see Eric Clapton's Psychedelic "Fool" SG which ended up with Todd Rundgren for a while. The book does go back on track telling the story of the British guitarists such as Clapton, Jeff Beck and Keith Richards discovering the tone of the 1958 to 1960 Les Paul Sunburst guitars and literally making them famous overnight.

The book covers page after page of guitarists synonymous with the Les Paul and who had custom versions named after them. Just to name drop a few, there is Tom Scholz of Boston with his famous goldtop and of course Slash who the book reveals only had a copy when he was recording 'Appetite For Destruction'; as a relief to all, Slash has real ones now.

With so many stars mentioned in the book sticking by the Les Paul, when temptations abound by the likes of Jackson, Dean and PRS, it is a testament to its classic design and tone. This is a worthy book colourfully showing of the guitar in all its glory.

'GUITAR PLAYER: THE INSIDE STORY...'
JIM CROCKETT & DARA CROCKETT *(Backbeat Books)*

Fully entitled, 'Guitar Player: The Inside Story Of The First Two Decades Of The Most Successful Guitar Magazine Ever', this book does what it says on the tin. Written by Jim Crockett, editor of Guitar Magazine from 1970 to 1989 and his daughter Dara, the book covers the glory days of the magazine when it was independent.

Guitar Player became a guitarist's point of reference and if a player was featured on the cover, it very much strengthened their profile and career. A major chapter of the book contains testaments to that effect from star guitarists such as Steve Morse, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai.

Even though the magazine was run by guitarists and/or people who really appreciated the guitar, there was a lot of commercial astuteness shown; major guitar and amplifier makes had decades-long, unbroken full page adverts in the mag. Also, the magazine often included a vinyl freebee, one of which gave a certain 'Attitude Song' by Vai a lot of pre-fame exposure.

The book is essentially written in three parts; firstly, the story of the magazine from the Crocketts' and key writers' points of view; next, the artists' memories of the magazine and finally, reminiscences from the companies that advertised within.

I should also mention that there are some fantastic photographs of the writers and the various big name guitarists smattered throughout the book. A nice trip down memory lane.

'NEIL YOUNG: LONG MAY YOU RUN'
DANIEL DURCHHOLZ & GARY GRAFF *(Voyageur Books)*

Neil Young's key selling point has always been he keeps up with the times and is seen as current by fans and musos alike. This comprehensive, grand and colourful book emphasises this point as this second edition (which adds the period from 2010 to the present day) shows that he has done quite a lot in the last few years.

Being a large book helps as the multitude of photos of Young during his early days in Buffalo Springfield, his iconic solo acoustic period and the Crazy Horse concerts are spectacular.

My main take-away from the book is the extent of the body of work Young has produced; it appears he collected the output from all his recording sessions. The 2009 collection 'Archives Vol. 1' has one hundred and twenty-eight tracks on it, with half the material being previously unreleased or alternative takes on classic songs.

Young also has been involved in a vast number of films; mainly live shows but also some avant-garde moments; either way, the book covers Young's multimedia career with equal care. In summary, this is an expansive book about a genuine living legend.

'SLIPKNOT: DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY PORTRAITS'
PAUL HARRIES *(Omnibus Press)*

Slipknot has a physical presence to match its musicality and so is a good choice for a photograph album book. No better person to take the challenge is Paul Harries (photographer for Kerrang! amongst others) who not only takes exceptional photographs but is also a trusted friend of the band. So amongst the high-res, colourful and intense photographs of this very graphic band are lots of personal reminisces of the band plus some nice quotes from the band members who don't have a bad word to say about Harries.

The book starts back in 2000, when Harries photographed the band's U.K. debut and documents the maturing of the band's image (and crowd sizes) and Harries' developing relationship with the band. The most poignant photo is one in Athens in 2011 which was the first gig after the death of bassist Paul Gray – just eight band members stride into the arena with their heads down.

If anything, the band members' masks get more macabre as time passes and the book closes with the photos of the Wembley 2015 show demonstrating this. A recommended read for fans of the band or for someone interested in how to take dynamic and striking band shots.

FOR MORE REVIEWS OF ALBUMS, DVDS, CONCERTS AND MORE, VISIT WWW.ROCKTOPIA.CO.UK

PLAYLISTS

Ant Heeks compiles our writers' chart, where former Angel front-man Frank Dimino claims the Top Spot with his first awesome solo release.

1

Dimino
'Old Habits Die Hard'
(Frontiers)

2

Anneke van Giersbergen
'Day After Yesterday: Agua de Annique Collected'
(InsideOut)

3

Armored Saint
'Win Hands Down'
(Metal Blade)

Bruce Mee

1. **Ten** – The Dragon And Saint George EP
2. **W.A.S.P.** – Golgotha
3. **Ozone** – Self Defence
4. **Stryper** – Fallen
5. **The V** – Now Or Never

Dave Scott

1. **Delain** – We Are The Others
2. **Whitesnake** – Good To Be Bad
3. **Bryan Adams** – Waking Up The Neighbours
4. **Battle Beast** – Unholy Savior
5. **Thunder** – Twenty Years And Out - The Farewell Tour (Hammersmith)

James Gaden

1. **The Dan Band** – The Wedding Album
2. **Jared James Nichols** – Old Glory And The Wild Revival
3. **The Powwow Rock Orchestra** – Everybody Powwow
4. **Slash's Snakepit** – Ain't Life Grand
5. **Blackmore's Night** – All Our Yesterdays

Steven Reid

1. **Armored Saint** – Win Hands Down
2. **KKB** – Got To Get Back
3. **IO Earth** – New World

4. **Tim Bowness** – Stupid Things That Mean The World
5. **SOTO** – Inside The Vertigo

Ant Heeks

1. **Bad Touch** – Half Way Home
2 **Mike Tramp** – Nomad
3. **Destine** – Forevermore
4. **Dimin** – Old Habits Die Hard
5. **Constancia** – Final Curtain

Rob McKenzie

1. **AC/DC** – Rock Or Bust

2. **Russ Ballard** – The Fire Still Burns
3. **Tank** – War Machine
4. **The London Souls** – Here Come The Girls
5. **Giuffria** – Giuffria

Mónica Castedo-López

1. **The Dead Daisies** – Revolución
2. **Backyard Babies** – Four By Four
3. **Mike Tramp** – Nomad
4. **Spike's Free House** – 100% Pure Frankie Miller
5. **Gus G.** – Brand New Revolution

Ian Johnson

1. **Amorphis** – Under The Red Cloud
2. **Operation Mindcrime:** – The Key
3. **Ozone** – Self Defence
4. **Royal Hunt** – XIII Devil's Dozen
5. **Between The Buried & Me** – Coma Ecliptic

Gary Marshall

1. **Spock's Beard** – The Oblivion Particle
2. **Magic Pie** – King for a Day
3. **Dennis Churchill-Dries** – I
4. **Arena** – The Unquiet Sky
5. **Ten** – Isla de Muerta

Dave Bott

1. **Wearing Scars** – A Thousand Words
2. **Seek Ivory** – Tech 'N' Roll
3. **Stellar Revival** – Love, Lust & Bad Company
4. **Dawes** – All Your Favourite Bands
5. **Wilson** – Ready To Rise

Ray Paul

1. **Armored Saint** – Win Hands Down
2. **The Who** – Live At Shea Stadium DVD
3. **Disasterpiece** – It Follows
4. **Kadavar** – Berlin
5. **Sacrilege** – Six6Six

Mike Newdeck

1. **Days of Jupiter** – Only Ashes Remain
2. **Southern Gentlemen** –- Demoes
3. **Grenouer** – Unwanted Today
4. **July For Kings** – Middletown
5. **Stone Broken** – The Crow Flies

Julia Braun

1. **Royal Hunt** – Devil's Dozen
2. **Supertramp** – Live in Paris '79
3. **Toto** – XIV
4. **Melissa Etheridge** – A Little Bit Of Me - Live in L.A.
5. **Thunder** – Wonder Days

Alexandra Mrozowska

1. **Motörhead** – Bad Magic
2. **Michael Bormann** – Closer
3. **Hungryheart** – Dirty Italian Job
4. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
5. **Whitesnake** – The Purple Album

Sophie Brownlee

1. **Backyard Babies** – Four by Four

2. **Buckcherry** – Rock N Roll
3. **The Struts** – Everybody Wants
4. **Diamond Dogs** – Quitters & Complainers
5. **Kiss** – Creatures of the Night

Duncan Jamieson

1. **Kelly Keeling** – Mind Radio
2. **Lynch Mob** – Rebel
3. **Skintrade** – Scarred For Life
4. **Delta Deep** – Delta Deep
5. **The Deep** – Premonition

Brent Rusche

1. **Diemonds** – Never Gonna Die

2. **Awaken The Empire** – Aurora
3. **The Murder Of My Sweet** – Beth Out Of Hell
4. **Dimino** – Old Habits Die Hard
5. **My Refuge** – A Matter Of Supremacy

Az Chaudhry

1. **Yes** – Drama
2. **Yes** – Like It Is: Live at the Mesa Arts Center
3. **Chris Squire** – Fish Out Of Water
4. **Yes** – Progeny
5. **Arena** – The Unquiet Sky

Mick Burgess

1. **Anneke van Giersbergen** – Day After Yesterday: Agua de Annique Collected
2. **Dimino** – Old Habits Die Hard
3. **Kamelot** – Haven
4. **Randy Piper's Animal** – Virus
5. **Fleetwood Mac** – Live at First Direct Arena, Leeds 2015

Mark Donnelly

1. **Dark Horse Flyer** – Breakaway
2. **Kamelot** – Haven

3. **Trixter** – Human Era
4. **Dennis Churchill-Dries** – I
5. **Stala & So.** – Stala & So

Dave Crompton

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **Serpentine** – Circle Of Knives
3. **Ice Blue** – Back To The Light
4. **Beauvoir/Free** – American Trash
5. **This Oceanic Feeling** – Universal Mind

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

1. **The Answer** – Raise A Little Hell
2. **Lynch Mob** – Rebel
3. **Dimino** – Old Habits Die Hard
4. **Royal Hunt** – XIII Devil's Dozen
5. **The V** – Now Or Never

Ian Parry

1. **Rage** – Nice 'n' Dirty
2. **Mad Max** – Thunder Storm & Passion
3. **The Dreaming Tree** – Silverfade
4. **The Fireflys** – Cathedral For Your Ashes
5. **Black Trip** – Shadowline

Michael Anthony

1. **Anneke van Giersbergen** – Day After Yesterday: Agua de Annique Collected
2. **Blues Pills** – Blues Pills
3. **Thundermother** – Road Fever
4. **Hayseed Dixie** – Hair Down to my Grass
5. **Dead and Stoned** – Of Hard Bones and Travelled Hearts

Woody

1. **Chaos Magic** – Chaos Magic
2. **HungryHeart** – Dirty Italian Job
3. **Lucy Rose** – Work It Out
4. **Degreed** – Dead But Not Forgotten
5. **Corvus** – Chasing Miracles

Mike Ainscoe

1. **Tim Bowness** – Stupid Things That Mean The World
2. **Amorphis** – Under The Red Cloud
3. **Vennart** – The Demon Joke
4. **Caspian** – Sad Heart Of Mine (single)
5. **King Crow** – Eidos

Steve Swift

1. **Crack The Sky** – Animal Notes
2. **Rich Robinson** – The Ceaseless Sight
3. **Tracer** – Water For Thirsty Dogs
4. **Night Flight Orchestra** – Skyline Whispers
5. **Spock's Beard** – The Oblivion Particle

Carl Buxton

1. **Age Sten Nilsen's Ammunition** – Shanghaied
2. **Dark Sarah** – Behind The Black Veil
3. **Accept** – Objection Overruled
4. **Operation: Mindcrime** – The Key
5. **Stryper** – Fallen

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Sweden Rock Festival

SÖLVESBORG FESTIVAL 3-4-5-6 JUNE 2015

NORJE, SWEDEN – 03 – 06 JUNE 2015

Wednesday 03 June

One of the few criticisms you can level at the annual Sweden Rock Festival is that it isn't the easiest to get to, but over the last thirteen years we've managed to get the logistics down to a fine art. As is usual there wasn't much happening early on, the first day started mid-afternoon without utilising the two biggest stages, but a respectable crowd has gathered to see tribute band **Hazy/Dizzy**. I'm not sold on the need for bands of this type at a major festival, and to be honest they were really the only one on a bill of a hundred artists, but there's no denying that the familiar songs got the party started. U.K. Metallers **Hell** consolidated their victorious appearance here a couple years ago with another fine set of dramatic Rockers delivered charismatically by singer David Bower, with killer riffs from his brother Kev and celebrated Sabbat guitarist/producer Andy Sneap. The biggest crowd of the day was reserved for **The Quireboys**, who for once didn't seem to be firing on all cylinders, particularly singer Spike whose gravelly voice seemed even more gruff than usual. They pulled it together on the bigger hits 'Mona Lisa Smiled' and '7 O'Clock', helped by a full scale sing-along, but on the whole it was the most lacklustre set I've seen them play for many years.

Things didn't go too well for **Evergrey** either, but most of that was down to the poor mix, Tom Englund's voice failed to cut through clearly enough and his and returning guitarist Henrik Danhage's guitars and especially Rikard Zander's keys were completely drowned out by overloud drums for the first few songs. It eventually came together and in a show heavily weighted towards the latest 'Hymns For The Broken' disc, it's past classics like 'The Masterplan', 'Recreation Day' and 'A Touch Of Blessing' that consolidated the win. Without their madcap bass player and his specially designed two-string basses, **D.A.D.** were sadly not interesting enough to keep us there until 2am.

Thursday 04 June

A slightly later than intended start got us caught in traffic on day two, this resulted in completely missing **Delain** and just catching the tail end of Spike's second appearance fronting **Spike's Free House**, with an all-star band that was originally planned to include Free bassist Andy Fraser before his recent sad parting. A set of mostly Frankie Miller and Free covers ended with Frankie's 'Cheap Hotel' and 'Brooklyn Bridge', Free's 'The Hunter' and 'All Right Now', and a song I'm not familiar with that featured former Bonafide guitarist Mikael Fassberg on acoustic guitar. Spike was actually in better voice than the previous night and suited the material well, and with Thunder's Luke Morley on guitar, Free/Bad Company drummer Simon Kirke, Magnum keyboard player Mark Stanway and TQ' Nick Mailing on bass, I was a bit disappointed to not see the whole thing.

We followed this with the inimitable **Fish** who played a great set that included the whole of the 'Misplaced Childhood' album, and with It Bites keyboardist John Beck on board to boot. Unfortunately Beck had fallen down some steps at the back of the stage during sound-check and hobbled onstage on crutches, but still added his great backing vocals and sublime keys to the iconic album, which after Fish's 'Pipeline' and 'Feast Of Consequences' was delivered in one big block. It's sometimes easy to forget some of the other songs besides the hits 'Kayleigh' and 'Lavender', but 'Heart Of Lothian', 'Lords Of The Backstage' and 'Childhood's End?' are works of genius and it'll be sad when the man retires them. The guitar work from Robin Boult alongside Beck's keyboards was mesmerising, and whilst Fish has never been considered a great singer, he performed the album just the way it should sound. An encore of 'Internal Exile' and a riotous 'Market Square Heroes' sealed the first real highlight of the festival. On another stage **Slash Featuring Myles Kennedy And The Conspirators** put out the best show I've seen from him since Guns N' Roses' heyday. Obviously 'Nightrain', 'You Could Be Mine', 'Sweet Child O' Mine' and 'Paradise City' were the backbone of the set and Kennedy belted them out admirably, but the likes of 'Back From Cali', 'Anastasia' and Velvet Revolver's 'Slither' went down almost as well amongst other recent solo songs.

Taking the opportunity to stroll around and meet up with old friends (yes, you can do that!), I did notice that **Airbourne** were so crushingly loud on their stage that Carl Palmer's **ELP Legacy** struggled to be heard during the subtler moments of 'Take A Pebble' and 'Tarkus', whilst **Battle Beast's** Noora Louhimo indeed does have the pipes that she hinted at on the new 'Unholy Savior' album. However, this evening was all about **Toto**, who somehow managed to transfer the phenomenal live sound of their recent 'XIV' tour to the outdoors without too much trouble. The set was slightly truncated but still included the epics 'Caught In The Balance' and 'Great Expectations' alongside all the hits and some lesser known album tracks, Steve Lukather lead the line with his endearing stage presence and killer guitar licks. It was Joe Williams' turn to have a cold this time but it didn't detract from the sheer musicality of the set, even though David Paich's "dad dancing" does. The closing 'Rosanna' and 'Africa' seemed fresher than ever tonight, probably due to a lot of the crowd having never seen the band before and being especially grateful that they came.

Another band with a clear live sound was **Hammerfall**, tonight being one of the best sets I'd ever seen them play. Joacim Cans is one of the most underrated Power Metal singers out there, and even if their albums aren't that consistent, they still have enough good ones like 'Blood Bound', 'Let The Hammer Fall' and 'Last Man Standing' to fill a ninety minute set. Killer bass and drums and the slick guitar work of the great Pontus Norgren and founder Oscar Dronjak made them seem less cheesy than they really are, an encore of 'Templars Of Steel', 'Bushido' and the superb 'Hearts Of Fire' justified their highest ever place on the bill. Sorry Exodus fans but they played at the same time as Hammerfall, and whilst the original plan was to see half of each, Hammerfall were so good that I didn't want to leave.

Def Leppard also put in one of their better performances, nothing too surprising mind you, just a good run through most of their best known songs. They really need to drop the cover of 'Rock On' and Rick Savage's bass solo is possibly the worst of its kind, but Joe Elliott's solo acoustic 'Two Steps Behind' was a nice change of pace amongst the highlights from 'Pyromania' and 'Hysteria'. Elliott sang well for a change and the whole band looked happy, it was just a bit sad that after Elliott and a healthy looking Vivian Campbell had conducted such a great press conference earlier in the day, it was announced a few days after this great show that Viv's cancer had come back. We wish him well.

Half of our group decided to head back to the house at midnight, whilst others stayed to watch Swedish Metal phenomena **Ghost**. Having reached number one in their national album chart and high positions in other Scandinavian countries, the band were completely anonymous and are fronted by a "demonic anti-pope" character called Papa Emeritus with the other five members wearing horned masks and each referred to as "A Nameless Ghoul". Every now and again they killed off Emeritus and replace him with another, tonight being the night we're introduced to Papa Emeritus III, although it's also rumoured that it's still the same guy. Anyway, the show was quite spectacular and the costumes quite eerie, although the music was more melodic than you'd expected and the singer's talking voice was hilariously polite. I didn't hear the Blue Oyster Cult comparisons that I'd been told, but it's definitely old-school with elements of 1970's Rock, Prog and even Psychedelic. An interesting end to the day.

Friday 05 June

Day three started out in the same chaotic way, we once again hit traffic on the way in and missed the noon set by **Dare**. We arrived by mid-set point of **Molly Hatchet**, the classic Southern Rockers who only have one original member, guitarist Dave Hlubek. It's China Sky guitarist Bobby Ingram and singer Phil McCormack who were the focal points as they raced through a set-list that included 'Bounty Hunter', Gator Country', 'Beatin' The Odds' and 'Flirtin' With Disaster', but as good as they were I failed to understand the inclusion of The Allman Brothers' 'Dreams' when their own 'Boogie No More' was absent. Sadly the **Rockklassiker All Stars** didn't feature half as many stars as previous years and their predictable covers soon got boring, unlike **Evergrey** who made their second appearance doing an acoustic set. I've never seen them do anything like this before and Tom Englund's voice really suited these stripped down versions of 'As I Lie Here Bleeding', 'Blinded', 'Recreation...' et al, the Swedes wound up with a crowd-pleasing version of Maiden's 'Wasted Years'.

The first big surprise of the day was the Robert Hart-fronted **Manfred Mann's Earth Band**, with the seventy-four year old South African keyboard player cutting a masterful figure as he led a band of consummate musicians that also included renowned drummer Jimmy Copley. Hart did Chris Thompson's job admirably on the hits 'Don't Kill It Carol', 'Davy's On The Road Again' and the classic 'Blinded By The Light', even going back to the sixties before Mann re-invented himself for a rapturously received 'Mighty Quinn'. Slick, energetic and a perfect accompaniment to a wonderful summer's day, the MMEB certainly set the bar for the day and conversations about them seemed to be littered with superlatives. The busiest day of the festival continued with a rare European

appearance by **Dokken**; Don Dokken and drummer Mick Brown were joined by regular guitarist Jon Levin and new bass player Mark Boals, better known as a singer with Malmsteen, Royal Hunt and recently Dio's Disciples. Now, I love Dokken as much as the next man, in fact more so, but it really pained me to hear Dokken crooning 'Kiss Of Death', 'The Hunter', 'Dream Warriors' etc. in a deep voice without really following the melodies of the original songs. Is it better than trying to hit the high notes and failing? I'm not sure, but I do know that he should be using Boals' incredible range more to back him up. Guitarist Levin was a brilliant technician who played George Lynch's solos as they should be, but put little of himself into it, and apart from a decent version of the more laid back 'Alone Again' and good stab at 'It's Not Love' (which segues into 'All Right Now') I was left bitterly disappointed.

I'm also a big fan of **Opeth**, the Swedish Progressive Death Metal band who've dropped almost all of the growling vocals over the last few albums. Here they were note perfect and delivered complex rhythms, inventive riffs and beautiful musical passages like it was the easiest thing in the world. Their sound was perfect from the beginning with breathtaking performances of the likes of 'The Drapery Falls', 'The Lotus Eater' and 'The Grand Conjuration', the guitars of leader Mikael Akerfeldt and Fredrik Akesson melded and then broke apart to create magical themes for Akerfeldt to sing over like only he can. The only downside is that his stage raps are usually hilariously funny and one of the highlights of the set, but being in his own country, he naturally spoke in Swedish. The audience laughed but I had no idea what at. I immediately went from Opeth to German Melodic Rockers **Mad Max** who had about fifteen minutes left; Michael Voss, Axel Kruse and company ripped through 'Never Say Never', 'Stormchild' and Rollin' Thunder' like a band who tour constantly rather than play the odd show. Voss has a distinctive voice that never seems to change and is a master at short, sharp Rock anthems. There were a few hundred appreciative souls but MM deserved better.

This is where things really got busy, and whilst I had the dilemma of **Pat Travers**, Tony Carey and the reformed Lucifer's Friend all overlapping, long-time favourite Travers made it easier by having a voice that was hardly there and a malfunctioning guitar pedal that buzzed loudly every time he went to do a solo. Also his set-list choices can be a bit iffy, he started well with 'Rock 'N' Roll Suzie', 'Life In London' and 'Crash And Burn', but by the time we got to a cover of Ray Charles' 'I've Got News For You' and Leadbelly's 'Black Betty', the poor guitar sound and vocal saw me head out. Thankfully ex-Rainbow keyboard player **Tony Carey** (who ironically played on Travers' 'Putting It Straight' album) fared much better, he mixed things up with tracks from his solo releases and albums under the name of Planet P. Project. Amazingly, whilst he may have fallen off the radar for most people when he left Rainbow in 1977, he's gone on to record over thirty albums for himself as well as collaborating with Joe Cocker, Jennifer Rush and countless others. He still has a strong voice, as evidenced on tracks like 'Why Me?', 'A Fine Fine Day' and the brilliant 'Burning Bridges', but the biggest goose-bump moment of the whole festival was when he started the synth intro to Rainbow's 'Tarot Woman' and was joined by Wigwam/Ammunition singer Age Sten Nilsen who did an amazing Ronnie James Dio impersonation on that and 'Run With The Wolf'. Carey recovered from the same stomach cancer that killed RJD so the tribute was especially heartfelt.

German Classic Rock outfit **Lucifer's Friend** had been inactive for many years before this reunion, but such was the confidence of original ex-Uriah Heep singer John Lawton, guitarist Peter Hesslein and bassist Dieter Horns that they started with a new song, 'Pray', which was refreshingly old-school with plenty of Hammond Organ and a real Heep/Deep Purple vibe. 'In The Time Of Job', the doomy 'Keep Going' and the vibrant 'Ride The Sky' belied their 1970 origins, whilst 'Moonshine Rider' and closer 'Dirty Old Town' showed off Lawton's rich voice (he can't be far behind Mann in age!) and the band's classy song-writing. Originally written off as seventies also-rans, history has re-evaluated LF place in the universe and their debut album has come in for a lot of posthumous love, and quite rightly so.

Mötley Crüe however are a once great band on their last legs, with only drummer Tommy Lee and guitarist Mick Mars nearing the end of their time with any dignity. After an intro tape of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'So Long, Farewell' only opener 'Saints Of Los Angeles', 'Mutherfucker Of The Year', 'Primal Scream' and a cover of 'Anarchy In The U.K.' didn't come from their successful first five album run. So many great songs were a pale shadow of their former selves, with Vince Neil either squawking out of tune or hiding behind a backing track which also sometimes seems to include Nikki Sixx's bass. Despite the catchiness of 'Wild Side', 'Looks That Kill', 'Live Wire', 'Girls, Girls, Girls' etc., their set will be remembered for the complete train wreck that was 'Dr. Feelgood', Neil walked offstage with his microphone not working but the vocal carrying on, the confusion causing others to come in at the wrong time and an obviously irate Sixx to stop playing altogether. An encore of 'Home Sweet Home' was hardly even called for.

It was midnight again but no-one was going home until **H.e.a.t** have plied their trade, ripping the stage a new one with basically the same set as their recent 'Live In London' album. Watching singer Erik Grönwall cover every inch of the stage and photo pit is enough to make anyone out of breath, but he didn't miss a note as the band charged through no less than ten songs from the 'Tearing Down The Walls' album, highlights being opener 'Point Of No Return', 'Inferno', the quirky 'Mannequin Show' and a raucous 'Emergency'. A short drum solo and the Swedish drinking song are handled with plenty of humour, but it's the encore pairing of 'Breaking The Silence' and 'Living On The Run' that kept a tired third day crowd nailed to the spot until almost 2am.

Saturday 06 June

In contrast to the madness of the previous two full days, the last day gave us the comfort of several relaxing interludes. We even had a late start and missed **Hardcore Superstar**, **Exciter** and the rather pointless version of the great **Riot** without their sadly deceased leader. We arrive just as **Ace Frehley** walked onto the stage, to the strains of his instrumental 'Fractured Mirror', and then launched into 'Rocket Ride' and heralded a show that was equal parts Kiss and solo material. With Richie Scarlet putting in an energetic shift, the enigmatic Frehley used his talents well and gave the crowd what they wanted, from songs like 'Snowblind', the newer 'Toys' and the excellent 'Rip It Out', to his Kiss calling cards 'Parasite', 'Shock Me' and 'Cold Gin'. A band member took the mic for 'Love Gun' and smoke poured out of Frehley's guitar, so basically just what you'd want from a Frehley show.

Personal favourites **Mother's Finest** happily avoided the downpour that marred their set here a few years ago, the U.S. Funk Metal pioneers mixed early tunes like 'Mickey's Monkey', 'Can't Fight The Feeling' and 'Baby Love' with more recent grittier fare 'Shut Up', 'Cling To The Cross' and surprise encore 'My Badd'. Joyce "Baby Jean" Kennedy

fronted the band like Tina Turner on steroids and husband Glenn Murdock chipped in with a few lead vocals too. With the phenomenal bass playing of Wyzard and the madcap antics of guitarist Moses, I was blown away by them yet again. The next couple of hours was mainly heavier bands; the old-school Thrash of **Nuclear Assault**, Swedish Metallers **Avatar** and the aural assault (in a good way!) of **Five Finger Death Punch** were all impressive live acts but we were just filling in time until **Extreme** brought their 'Pornograffitti' twenty-fifth anniversary tour to

Sweden. The sound on this stage had been a little bit off all week but despite a lack of serious volume on Nuno Bettencourt's guitar, it was one of the better shows I've seen by them recently. 'Decadence Dance', 'Get The Funk Out' and 'It's A Monster' were all highlights, but it was the sing-alongs for 'More Than Words' and 'Hole Hearted' that visibly moved the band, whilst other albums were represented by the entertaining 'Kid Ego/Play With Me', 'Cupid's Dead' and an excellent 'Am I Ever Gonna Change'. Singer Gary Cherone had a bit of an off night and complained that he couldn't hear himself, but the backing from Bettencourt and underrated bassist Pat Badger was more than adequate. I didn't expect the cover of 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' though.

If Extreme's sound was a bit off, headliner's **Judas Priest's** was just about perfect, the Metal legends bringing their A-game; Rob Halford sounded his best in years. They weren't afraid to air the new album either, opener 'Dragonaut', 'Halls Of Valhalla', 'March Of The Damned' and the title track shared space alongside bonafide classics 'Victim Of Changes', 'Beyond The Realms Of Death' and 'Metal Gods'. Guitarist Ritchie Faulkner brought the fire to battle with the more melodic Glenn Tipton, whilst

bassist Ian Hill and drummer Scott Travis provided the thunder. It was a perfect headline set that saw Halford hitting all the high notes in 'Electric Eye', 'Painkiller', 'Breaking The Law' and another dozen Metal classics, backed by a spectacular stage show. To round things off we all settled into a crowded front and centre spot for **The Darkness** to bring this year's festival to a close. I'm not really a big fan but it was an entertaining ninety minutes, their clown prince Justin Hawkins lead the band through 'Growing On Me', 'One Way Ticket To Hell And Back', 'Every Inch Of You', 'Get Your Hands Off My Woman' and the inevitable 'I Believe In A Thing Called Love', but some of the songs from the new album were even better. It would have been even funnier if we hadn't spent the last of our energies trying to divert the drunks who insisted on trying to get through the crowd rather than around it.

So, in short (too late for that?), we had an awesome time even though the line-up didn't initially look as strong as some previous years, and that's why the Sweden Rock Festival is the best, most varied and most civilised outdoor event on the planet.

Phil Ashcroft

DOWNLOAD 2015, DONINGTON PARK – 12 – 14 JUNE

FRIDAY 12 JUNE

Every year, during the Download festival, something happens that makes me say "never again". It could be the weather, losing something, getting something damaged, or just the fact that it takes about a week to get over it, assuming I survived it in the first place. Inevitably however I come back and do it again. And not just me; there's up to ninety thousand people sharing those fields. That is sadomasochism on an industrial scale!

There is always a "quiet", a naff and a busy day at Download and this year was no different, except that Friday was both a bit naff and quiet, as far as the bands I wanted to see was concerned. It started off pretty well, bright and sunny, but in the usual way of things it didn't start perfectly. Technology issues associated with this being the first major U.K. festival to go cashless cost us over two hours and because of that, I missed the bus to the second stage where I had intended to check out Rival State; that was the weekend's first disaster over with so I hoped things could only get better.

So the first band up for me was **LACUNA COIL**. I am very familiar with their music but this would be the first time I had seen them with their new members, and I remember watching them last time they played here and thinking that they lacked drive as their hearts did not appear to be in it. This time however they were on the ball. It's not easy to do just a twenty-five to thirty minute set, you are inevitably finishing just as you are normally warming up and maybe the new personnel has added that little spark that they needed. There were obviously some favourites in the set; 'Spellbound', 'Enjoy The Silence' and 'Our Truth' alongside newer numbers like 'Die And Rise', 'Zombies' and 'Nothing Stands In Our Way'. The crowd were more than happy with what they got from LC, particularly the male members as Cristina Scabbia was dressed in very interesting attire. (AB)

I then decided to check out **DRAGONFORCE**, mainly because I had only seen them once before and I hadn't paid too much attention back then. I always got the impression that they were a total shred band with the customary million-beats-per-second drumming, but within the six songs they did this afternoon I was convinced other-wise with their surprisingly melodic choruses. The real surprise of the

set was 'Give Me Choco' which was a song by their label-mates **BABYMETAL**, and the fact that Babymetal themselves came on stage to do the number.

My first act to cover of the day was seasoned U.K. Hard Rockers **THUNDER** who showed that neither their age nor the pouring rain would impede a majestic performance. The early part of their set focused upon their latest album with the beautifully played 'Black Water', 'Broken' and 'Resurrection Days'. Although these were great songs, the public expected some early hits and so the band travelled back in time with the likes of 'Backstreet Symphony' and 'Love Walked In'. After one further new track, more classics followed, such as 'Dirty Love', where everyone in the audience sang along wholeheartedly. Danny Bowes' vocals were a joy to listen to and together with Luke Morley drove the band to spectacular levels and demonstrated they are still in great shape twenty-five years after their debut. (MCL)

JUDAS PRIEST needed no introduction at an event like this. They made it look so easy, although Rob Halford looked like an old man walking on with his "stick". Some classic Priest songs were wheeled out this evening, these included 'Metal Gods', 'Victim Of Changes', 'Turbo Lover', 'Breaking The Law', 'Hell Bent For Leather', with 'Painkiller' and 'Living After Midnight' as part of the encore. All things Priest were present including the leathers and the motorbike, the only thing that spoiled it was the weather as it had decided to throw it down just before the band came on. This didn't bother them at all as they decided to have a walk out onto the runway to get wet with the rest of the crowd.

SATURDAY 13 JUNE

As on Friday, it was another Female-Fronted band that started the day for me in the shape of **LOVE ZOMBIES**. I knew nothing about them other than they were a Female-Fronted and I found out they were from London led by American vocalist Hollis J. They turned out to be a Pop Punk band that had quite a raw delivery but they were quite fun to watch. And one thing that did impress me was how Hollis came to the front to talk to fans after the set.

Up next was yet another Female-Fronted band **NEW YEARS DAY** who were a little more Metal than LZ and seemed to take the music a little more seriously. Vocalist Ashley Costello unfortunately ran out of her red hair dye halfway through the process but it did leave her with a distinctive look. There was a sizeable crowd in the tent to catch them and I know the stage wasn't the biggest but the people in there had obviously heard of them to the extent that they sang along to the songs.

It had been a few years since I last saw **APOCALYPTICA**, and I remember from that first time how amazed I was that they were a) playing cellos at Download and b) how amazing those cellos sounded in the context of the music that was being played on them. They've now evolved and have added a vocalist and I was still as amazed by their sound. They did have some technical issues with amplification before they started but I assume that problem was resolved as they sounded fine to me. They gave us a taste of Franky Perez's voice with 'Cold Blood' and 'Shadowmaker' from the new album as well as an expected cover song, but it was Sepultura's 'Refuse/Resist' rather than a Metallica song.

It seemed somehow strange to see **ACE FREHLEY** perform a short thirty minute set today whilst his former band Kiss were the main headline the next day. Yet this did not stop the guitarist/singer incorporating not one but five Kiss numbers, including 'Parasite', 'Cold Gin', 'Shock Me' and 'Love Gun'. The latter was undoubtedly the highlight of the afternoon as drummer Scott Coogan took over Frehley's vocals as he sat behind his kit. Taken from Frehley's latest work, 'Space Invader' in 2014, 'Toys' was well received, despite the less than desirable sound, and he ended the show with the Kiss track 'Deuce', where Frehley's solo deserved the big round of applause it received and the smoke coming out of this guitar added a nice visual touch. (MCL)

One thing about Download is that you can get quite a bit of down time when no bands familiar to you are playing, and this presents the opportunity to check out bands "not on my list". Today there were four that appeared and followed each other on one stage; namely **HOLLYWOOD UNDEAD, PARKWAY DRIVE, RISE AGAINST** and **A DAY TO REMEMBER**. They were all young bands, which meant they had plenty of energy and they were all okay and (to be fair) they all had their moments – be it strong choruses or whatever – but would I go out to see them again? Probably not.

What can one say about **BLACK STAR RIDERS** other than they are simply phenomenal? The band, who formed in 2013, took and performed some of the catchiest tunes from their first two albums including 'Bound For Glory', 'Soldierstown', 'All Hell Breaks Loose' and the twin guitar start of 'The Killer Instinct' which went down a storm. The quintet was firmly tight and impressed with the strength of their own material. Notwithstanding its brilliance, it was also the Thin Lizzy songs that punters wanted to hear from original Lizzy members that once shared the stage with the legendary Phil Lynott and BSR were not oblivious to the fact, hence they delighted their Download audience with brilliant renditions of 'Jailbreak', 'Are You Ready', the ever awesome 'The Boys Are Back in Town' and the timeless 'Whiskey In The Jar'. BSR are a band that never disappoints and they have managed to preserve their TL heritage in their mind-blowing sound. (MCL)

MARILYN MANSON was a name on my list simply because I don't like to be stuck in a rut and like to try out different styles and widen my musical palette. To be honest, whenever his name comes up I always think of Alice Cooper, the music is different but the concept is familiar. I didn't really see much of him because of the smoke, and his voice really is an acquired taste, but he did some numbers that I recognised, namely 'Disposable Teens', 'mOBSCENE', 'The Dope Show' and, as seemed to be the trend over the weekend, a couple of covers – the Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams' and Depeche Mode's 'Personal Jesus'. It may have been me, but there were a few long gaps between songs, which spoilt the flow a little, but hey, it was Manson, a legend in his own bathrobe and I had witnessed him live.

When I read that **MUSE** would be headlining on Saturday, I thought it an interesting choice; they are not Metal and could even be described as Progressive on a foggy day, but if I knew the Download crowd, they would be okay. The rain had stopped and I had expected to see more stuff on stage. For me personally, having been right at the front, things were a little low key and devoid of intensity when they

came on which was probably because they opened with new material in 'Drill Sergeant', 'Psycho' and 'The Handler', but as things went on and became more familiar everything settled down. They actually ended up playing six songs from 'Drones' (half of the album in fact) but the songs that got everybody moving were 'Hysteria', 'Supermassive Black Hole' and 'Knights Of Cydonia' which was the last song they performed before we got the impressive firework display.

SUNDAY 14 JUNE

It obviously became a recurring theme, but Sunday kicked off with yet another Female-Fronted band. I always like to come away from Download having seen a new band that I found interesting and I did that with **SEPTEMBER MOURNING** who interested me due to my liking my music to have some theatre with it. The whole thing was in fact a "trans-media project" with a very interesting background story fronted by the vision that is Emily Lazar. As she entered the stage in a black robe, I was reminded of Huntress a couple of years ago, but once the robe was off the familiarity had gone. To say she held your attention was an understatement; dressed in all white leather and face make-up she acted out the songs and it was quite mesmerising; so much so that I failed to note of the song titles bar Ben E. King's 'Stand By Me' which was done very differently. There were some technical issues with some low PA hum from the PA but it didn't detract too much; definitely one to keep an eye on.

The last day of the festival equalled an extremely early wake-up call for me as my first band was **THE DEAD DAISIES**. They made the most of their miniature twenty-five minute slot and ensured they delivered songs of different tempos, such as the Rocky 'Mexico', the slow and beautiful 'Lock 'N' Load' and 'Midnight Moses', a cover of The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. For lovers of the self-titled Mötley Crüe album in 1994, it could have been perhaps disheartening at first to see Corabi so early on the bill whilst the band he once fronted had the slot before the headliners, but many years have passed and the friendly and down-to-earth "Crabby" has moved on. His voice still had that this warm raspy vibe and it captured one's senses like no other, and despite their name, TDD proved to be very much alive and kicking. (MCL)

Next up were the beyond energetic **H.E.A.T**, one of the most deservedly revered bands in the current Hard Rock/AOR scene. Still in their twenties, the five-piece ensemble were burning fire on stage, particularly their Swedish Idol winner singer Erik Grönwall, who ran around and did flips like he was made of rubber. He was adrenaline in its purest form and ensured he heavily interacted with the audience. In fact, went down the stage front to be close to their fans during the first track, the powerful 'Point Of No Return', and did the same during the closer 'Living On The Run'. Few bands have this energy and these totally punchy and captivating tunes with monumental melodies. 'Mannequin Show' and the colossal 'Tearing Down The Walls' received the huge response they merited. An absolutely brilliant, yet extremely short, set from this talented bunch who can and do deliver time after time. (MCL)

Creed and Alter Bridge's Mark **TREMONTI** was here today under his own name and opted to do without any Creed or AB songs, making up his set with five songs from 2012's 'All I Was' and three from this year's 'Cauterize,' which probably tells you which is his favourite. Tremonti went through the heavy 'You Waste Your Time,' the "million-beats-per-second" 'Radical Change,' which isn't really my thing, and the slightly less manic 'Brains' and 'Decay.' To be honest the more I listened, the more I thought that (for most of their set) they sounded like Black Label Society.

The mystery band this year was **THE DARKNESS**. I can't watch them without laughing, but I thought I would take a walk over just to see how things went down in a medium sized environment. The crowd was about ten deep outside the tent, and I only got to level with the outside edge of the PA and it was so busy that I just thought sod it and came out again.

In 2010 I watched **BILLY IDOL** perform his sat in the pouring rain with his shirt off not giving a damn. He attained hero status from me by doing this and I thought "with a bit of luck" he would probably get away with it today, although it was raining prior to him coming on; in fact, his first comment was "at least it's not raining". With his ever present sidekick Steve Stevens on guitar, who took centre stage a few times and even played the guitar behind his head, Idol went through eight songs during his fifty minute set which included Generation X songs 'Dancing With Myself' and 'Ready, Steady, Go'. Naturally 'White Wedding' made an appearance and 'Rebel Yell' closed the show.

L7 have not been around for a few years. The American female Grungers gained notoriety in the nineties when front-woman Donita Sparks decided to take her clothes off during a live performance on television and they went on extended hiatus in 2001 only to reappear in 2014. I had to make a decision of whether to watch Slash or L7. I decided that, as I had photographed Slash every time he had been here, I would take a chance to see how L7 would fare in the Download arena. I assumed that they had calmed down a bit in the ensuing years and Sparks wouldn't be taking things off, or out, during their set... and she didn't. In the time they had they performed ten songs, and if you haven't experienced them before you may get some idea of what they are about from the titles of three of these – namely 'Deathwish', 'Shitlist' and 'Pretend That We're Dead,' which is probably the one most people know. I think it would be fair to say that after all this time, maybe the venom has diluted a little.

I therefore took the opportunity to catch **SLASH** myself, the iconic ex-Guns 'N' Roses guitar guru and worldwide renowned figure, with his trademark hat and sunglasses, had a massive audience awaiting his appearance. In Myles Kennedy (Alter Bridge) he has found the man that can sing both his solo material and tracks from the band that made him famous back in 1987. And whilst 'You're A Lie' and 'Anastasia' from his solo career, and Velvet Revolver's 'Slither' were superbly received, it was with GNR classics such as 'Nightrain', 'You Could Be Mine' and 'Sweet Child O' Mine' – with the outstanding guitar solo – where Slash and company were most adored by the wild audience, who helped them intensely with all the lyrics. There is no doubt that Kennedy is a fantastic singer and did deserved justice to these anthems in the annals of Rock 'n' Roll history. (MCL)

As singer Vince Neil mentioned several times, **MÖTLEY CRÜE** have been playing together for thirty-five years. That is quite an accomplishment considering the frictions they have had both internally and externally. What is undeniable is that their great music has influenced an array of bands, inspired millions of fans and they will be sorely missed on the live circuit. They kicked off with the title track from their last studio album, 2008's 'Saints Of Los Angeles', and quickly proved why they were invited to play the slot immediately before the headliners. Their set encompasses some of the very best hits of their career – some old, some new – and all of them delivered with energy and feeling. Each was a true anthem in its own right – 'Primal Scream', 'Same Ol' Situation', 'Looks That Kill', 'Too Fast For Love', 'Smoking In The Boys Room', 'Dr. Feelgood', 'Shout At The Devil', 'Live Wire', 'Girls, Girls, Girls' and 'Kickstart My Heart' – and they were spiced up with eye-catching sensual female back-up singers/dancers and visually enhancing pyros. What else could one ask for? Well, since they were in Sex Pistols' homeland, what better than the cover of 'Anarchy In The UK'? Fantastic! Oh, and wait! As the grateful audience were leaving their places, the band returned to perform the heartfelt 'Home Sweet Home'; a truly moving end to the show and their last Download performance. Whist it is true that Neil appeared to have forgotten some of the lyrics and some of the tracks were played at a faster pace than the original recordings, MC were a thrill to witness live as they performed these fantastic songs. (MCL)

So, after a busy weekend where we had seen sun, rain, mud (naturally) and a bit of sun again, it all came down to this, the closing ceremony with **KISS**. Now to be honest, I have never really been a big Kiss fan, I have seen them twice previously (the last time at Download in 2008) and I never really bought into the make-up and costume side of things, which is probably odd being an admirer of Alice Cooper. Today however, I was a little closer than I had ever been before which brought the whole thing into sharper focus. Starting with the Thin Lizzy-ish 'Detroit Rock City,' I realised that these guys knew exactly what they were doing; the choreography, the poses for the cameras and their total command of the space they inhabited. When drummer Eric Singer had touched down, they got down to business with 'Deuce', 'I Love It Loud', 'Do You Love Me', 'Calling Dr. Love', 'Cold Gin' and 'Black Diamond' to end the main set. The usual fire breathing from Gene Simmons in 'War Machine', the blood spit during his solo and Paul Stanley flying over the top of the crowd during 'Love Gun' were all there, and I was particularly happy to hear a bit of 'Won't Get Fooled Again' in 'Lick It Up.' The firework display at the end was naturally big, and I have never seen as much ticker tape as was shot into the air at the end of the night.

So, that was it for yet another year. We had survived again, despite Saturday's mud, but the thing that really amazed me was how, the day after it is all over, the sun came out... and stayed out; remarkable and bloody annoying. But what can you do? Close your eyes, breath and simply turn up for the next one.

Andy Brailsford & Monica Castedo-Lopez

FIRIN' ON ALL SIX!

KNIFEWORLD, GILMORE TRAIL
Manchester: Gullivers, 27 May 2015

"Hello freaks, how's it collapsing?" That's the greeting from front-man Kavus Torabi as Knifeworld dispel the droning, uncommunicative, instrumental sound of Gilmour Trail, soundscapes building, seemingly to show they can still do it, although closest thing GT have to a front-man, Joe Richards, is rather sweet.

Knifeworld are sweet too, so happy with the music they create, bringing the horns, an eight-piece struggling to find space. This is so good to see, the heart sings, particularly the jumble of characters, outfits and body-shapes, from saxophonist Josh Perl with his leather jacketed mafia look to keyboarding vocal foil Melanie Woods, austere and chatting with Torabi throughout. Plus word to Chloe Herrington, multi-instrumental and always interesting.

The sound they're producing is full and odd, they may all just turn up at half nine and plug in, but never confuse their nonchalance for boredom. New song 'I Am Lost' is very horny as it builds, aching for love and 'Don't Land On Me' is so laidback it is almost Trancy. They may be fiddling with the sound constantly, but Torabi is gently disarming, the only difficult moment when he is egged on by the love of the crowd to tell a rather racist story about his lifelong mate who is present; there is little coming back from it and it is necessary to give a huge benefit of an even bigger doubt to enjoy the rest of the show.

And the music is sublime, 'In A Foreign Way' swaying so much you have to jump on, even if they can be too dense at times - 'The Orphanage' makes it hard to find the door; The Wretched Fathoms' encapsulates their sound, jarring and angular with a disarming warmth.

Knifeworld are growing fast. Here, in a small venue, they stripped away the darkness and showed us just how layered their music is, just how talented they are to be able to play it and just how fun it can be. New EP collection 'Home Of The Newly Departed' is a stunner; they are a constant surprise, they are surprisingly fun. Freaks, get on board.

Steve Swift

ROBERT PLANT AND THE SENSATIONAL SPACE SHIFTERS
Los Angeles: The Greek Theatre, 02 June 2015

It was some time back in the early nineties that I last caught Robert Plant live, so I had been very much looking forward to re-acquainting myself with this legend. Set in the beautiful California hills of Griffith Park, The Greek Theatre was an atmospheric open air venue that housed around six thousand seats

The set kicked off with the Led Zeppelin number 'Wanton Song', and Plant looked terrific in shiny green shirt and black trousers as he took to the stage. His vocal performance was very impressive, and he has clearly learnt how to use his now seasoned voice to the best of his abilities; he never stretched things too far and chose songs that were within his range. He joked with the band and audience and this gave the show a more intimate feel. At times, he threw his greying mane back and forth during some songs and this was a reminder of his more hedonistic days (where he was known as "The Golden God"), this was a man at ease with his legacy and someone who was enjoying the musical journey he was on.

'Going To California' was announced after Plant told us how he had dreamt of playing the U.S. in his youth. Parts of the LZ catalogue like 'Black Dog' and 'Dazed And Confused' were presented in a new form and lapped up by the audience, before he dipped into songs from his latest brilliant release ('Lullaby And The Ceaseless Roar') with 'Turn It Up', 'Little Maggie' and 'Rainbow'. Sadly 'Heaven Knows' or 'Big Log' from his eighties period were not included, but you can't have everything, can you?

The audience was a complete cross section of ages, and it was clear from a certain familiar scent of herb in the air that a lot of people were having a real party! The band were all first class musicians and handled the material with skill and zeal. Guitarists Justin Adams and Liam Tyson took many of the Zeppelin numbers and infused their own mark on the songs.

'What Is And What Should Never Be' was very close to the original Led Zep version and we were also treated to an extended version of the crowd-pleasing classic 'Whole Lotta Love' and this had the audience in retro-rapture and it brought this superb show to its climactic end.

Ray Paul

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS, DON FELDER
Los Angeles: The Greek Theatre, 06 June 2015

This was a terrific musical double act and another great show that I caught on my recent trip to Los Angeles. I had not seen The Doobie Brothers since they had supported Foreigner in the nineties, and in my view, the ever increasing ticket prices to see The Eagles ensured I had spent my "gig money" elsewhere.

Don Felder, dressed in black with short blonde hair and armed with a Les Paul guitar, looked every inch the Rock star. His set-list took us on Californian road trip/ journey of Eagles classics like 'One Of These Nights', 'Witchy Woman' and 'Life In The Fast Lane'. We even got 'Heavy Metal (Taking a Ride)' from the soundtrack of the same name but sadly no 'All Of You'. Many of the songs came with his memories of the recordings and his backing band did a superb job of replicating the wonderful harmonies, with all of the seasoned audience clapping along and singing to every song.

Lesser known Eagles songs such as 'The Long Run' and 'Those Shoes' fitted in well with the set, and the white double neck Gibson was brought out for the show-stopping 'Hotel California'. With TDB guitarist John McFee guesting, the whole theatre stood up in appreciation and sang along with some air guitar for good measure.

You would think following Felder would be a daunting task, but when you're an American musical institution like The Doobie Brothers, you take it in your "laid-back" stride. Led by founding guitar players Tom Johnston, Patrick Simmons and long term member McFee, the one-two musical punch of 'Jesus Is Just Alright' and 'Rocking Down The Highway' went down as timeless classics that have lost none of their shine. When Johnston asked who bought the last album 'World Gone Crazy', he graciously thanked the six people who applauded with a smile and the band kicked into the aforementioned song with effortless skill. The Michael McDonald era of the band was sadly only represented by 'Taking It To The Streets', but when you have such nuggets as 'Long Train Running' and 'China Grove', all was forgiven.

Vocally, the band still sounded incredible, and you would have thought having two drummers would be cluttered. Not the case at all, as they locked in and kept the driving force behind the music perfectly. The encore of 'Listen To The Music' saw some family members join them on stage, and there was a true warmth to these guys. At times, it felt like being part of one almighty family gathering, as the whole arena that nestled in the dusky Hollywood Hills saw everyone up and dancing in the aisles – a sight I will never forget.

Ray Paul

SPIKE'S FREE HOUSE
London: The Borderline, London
07 June 2015

Some of you may be aware that last year Spike, the charismatic leader of The Quireboys, released an album featuring songs written by the late Frankie Miller. His collaborators on the album included a long list of highly respected artists, many of which took part in this tour; Thunder's guitarist Luke Morley, Free's drummer Simon Kirke and Magnum's keyboardist Mark Stanway. Unfortunately Free's bassist Andy Fraser, who also featured on the album, sadly passed away earlier this year so Nick Mailing (TQ) took his place and Spike's Free House could finally be taken on the road. Morley's riffs and solos worked wonders as they always do and the rest of the band, particularly the strong keyboard presence, proved a great choice to enhance Spike's leadership capabilities.

As advertised, the evening was a tribute to both Miller and Fraser and the music of the Scottish singer/ song-writer and of Free filled the evening with some fantastically contagious tracks. The opener, Miller's 'Be Good To Yourself', set the tone for the rest of the soirée with the magnificently solid quartet fronted by the one and only Spike and his beautifully raspy voice. The singer was in his usual good spirits during 'Miller's 'Bottle of Whisky' and joked about not having a clue what Miller's song 'Cocaine' was about. Only Spike can do that.

Other impressive songs from Miller included the moving 'Other Side Of Town' and 'Cold, Cold Nights' and the Rocking 'Brooklyn Bridge'. As for Free tracks, the famous 'Wishing Well' made it second on the set-list, whilst others came later, such as 'Mr. Big' and 'All Right Now'. The evening was closed with another heartfelt Miller number in the shape of 'Darlin'' and there were smiling faces all around for this was a truly fantastic evening of pure Rock and Roll.

Mónica Castedo-López

WHITESNAKE
Los Angeles: Saban Theatre, 09 June 2015

Over the years, the Whitesnake shows I had attended have sadly not impressed me. Poor vocal work from David Coverdale, clearly singing beyond his capabilities, and an all round distorted sound from them had almost left me ready to call time on the band. As I was on holiday in Los Angeles for the date that had been announced at the Saban Theatre (formerly know this as The Fox Wilshire Theater), I decided to give Whitesnake one more try.

With the stage bathed in a purple hue (no real surprise given they were touring in support of 'The Purple Album') and the familiar 1987 logo backdrop, the band tore onto the stage to the familiar guitar riff of 'Burn'. Two things became apparent to me very quickly – one was that Joel Hoekstra had fitted in perfectly (sorry ladies…I prefer him to Doug Aldrich!) and two that Coverdale's vocals were by far the best I had heard for some years. With the whole band singing, it clearly gave him the space to not wear out his voice. Whitesnake classics 'Slide It In' and 'Love Ain't No Stranger' kept the momentum going as Coverdale clinked glasses with audience members at the front in celebration. Guitarist Reb Beach was ever the cool professional and, along with Hoekstra, was all smiles and super-star Rock poses. Hopefully these guys will get a chance to write some new material together in the future. Talking of newish material, only 'Forevemore' was played but in my opinion, 'Love Will Set You Free' would have been a stronger choice.

Sadly, the set featured little else from the early years either as it was very much built around the 'Purple' covers album with some working better than others. 'Gypsy' and 'Mistreated' were terrific while 'You Fool No One' really missed Ian Paice's groove-laden percussion...something quirky drummer Tommy Aldridge could never compete with despite the fact he was a whirlwind of sticks and hair.

In a surprise moment (and because it was his birthday!) ex-Deep Purple co-singer Glenn Hughes joined Coverdale on stage to sing 'You Keep On Moving' and it was pure musical magic. Self-indulgently, I would have loved him to have returned to sing 'Stormbringer' instead of 'Lay Down, Stay Down' – a missed opportunity perhaps?

We got the obligatory guitar and drum solos – a break for Coverdale no doubt but a little boring for the audience – though they seemed less drawn out than I remembered from past. Aldridge is one of the few drummers that knows how to put a solo together and still entertain the crowd.

By the time the band had thrown out 'Give Me All Your Love' and 'Is This Love', we were singing our hearts out. The band could not leave without the anthems of 'Here I Go Again' and 'Still Of The Night' and these brought a special evening's music to a wonderful end.

Ray Paul

LOVERBOY, RIK EMMETT
Burlington, Ontario: Sound Of Music Festival
21 June 2015

Anyone who knows me knows my love of Canadian Rock, so imagine my delight to find two of my all-time favourites playing the last day of a free outdoor festival, just an hour's train journey from our Toronto base for the Rush R40 tour. Add in the close proximity of ex-pat friends and a gorgeous sunny day and you have the makings of a dream gig, so it was such a shame that only one of the artists really delivered on the day.

The much lauded Triumph reunion at Sweden Rock a few years ago had proven to be a bit of a damp

squib, singer/guitarist Rik Emmett seemingly reluctant to get into the spirit of the occasion with a lack-lustre performance that reeked of going through the motions. Sadly this performance with his solo band was pretty much the same; although they weren't helped by current drummer Paul DeLong (also Kim Mitchell/FM) being stranded at Philadelphia Airport, the stand-in joined bassist Steve Skingley and guitarist Dave Dunlop for the obvious Triumph set that's probably a condition for Emmett being booked for these shows. Most of the hits were there, from the early 'Lay It On The Line' and 'Hold On', through to the 'Sport Of Kings' single 'Somebody's Out There', with only the latter coming across well. Emmett let Dunlop do almost half of the solos and didn't go for most of the high notes, and with nervous glances towards the drummer for some awkward song endings, it's actually the Skingley-sung 'Allied Forces' that was the highlight of the set. I could generally do without the covers of 'Boys Of Summer' and 'Rocky Mountain Way', and 'Ordinary Man' even lacked the fast bit in the middle, but 'Magic Power', 'Fight The Good Fight' and 'Suitcase Blues' were simply too good not to be enjoyed. On this evidence it's perhaps just as well that Triumph didn't continue past the two festival shows.

By direct contrast Loverboy were on fire, they were obviously enjoying themselves and ran through a fourteen song set-list taken exclusively from their first five Columbia albums. Mike Reno may have be carrying a lot of weight these days but his voice was faultless as he belted out the opening salvo of 'Notorious', 'Lucky Ones' and the wonderful 'Queen Of The Broken Hearts', the latter was complete with keyboardist Doug Johnson's vocoder backing vocals. Paul Dean's gritty guitar and Johnson's inventive keyboards were all over the moody 'Take Me To The Top', whilst the hit ballad 'This Could Be The Night' showed just how much of his vocal chops Reno has managed to keep. From halfway in it was classics all the way with the swirling keys of 'The Kid Is Hot Tonight', 'When It's Over' and the Party Rocker 'Hot Girls In Love', which was complete with a killer drums and bass showcase by Matt Frenette and Ken "Spider" Sinnaeve. "Spider" has been a personal hero since his days in Streetheart alongside Dean and Frenette, so it was a special treat to finally see him play and he certainly didn't disappoint with a perfectly delivered 'Turn Me Loose', followed by a well-received 'Working For The Weekend', it was Friday after all. An encore of 'Lovin' Every Minute Of It' and the Bryan Adams co-write 'Jump' brought things to a perfect end in the mid-afternoon sun. Loverboy have lost nothing since I last saw them in the eighties and are one of the few classic acts still at the top of their game.

Phil Ashcroft

THUNDER, COLOUR OF NOISE
Germany: Zeche, Bochum, June 21 2015

With the ever present combination of fantastic songs, superb musicianship, sensational showmanship and constant crowd interaction, I have always loved attending Thunder gigs. I had been looking forward to this event as it was the first show I'd seen since they called time on their careers back in July 2009.

The support act was Colour Of Noise, a band that features two established musicians that may be known to Fireworks readers in Bruce John Dickinson (ex-Little Angels guitarist) and Matt Mitchell (ex-Pride vocalist and currently fronting Furyon). This Brighton-based five-piece strolled out to a half full club and proceeded to fire off seven Classic Hard Rock styled tracks that included the lively 'Head On', the Sleazy 'Can't Take It With You When You're Gone' and AC/DC-like 'Driven Like You Stole It'. Each band member seemed to be having a blast and this only added to the enjoyment of these entertaining tracks. They brought things to a close with 'Hittin' Rock Bottom' which included plenty of crowd participation in the chorus and they received a huge closing cheer from the highly appreciative audience that had grown to about three quarters full. Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed CON as did the others that I attended with and I look forward to hearing their debut; these guys are one to watch out for!

By the time Thunder were due on stage, my emotions were consumed by my excitement and enthusiasm to see this excellent band in the live environment once again. I was also keen to see how the usually reserved German audience would respond to Danny Bowes persistent participation encouragement. As was expected their fifteen song set-list consisted of a mixture of tracks from their excellent new album 'Wonder Years' interspersed with a selection of classic hits and favourites. They came out to the ever present 'Thunderstruck' intro and I was impressed with the loudness of the cheer as they appeared on stage and kicked into 'Wonder Days'. They slipped a welcome oldie in next in the shape of 'River Of Pain' and it was great to hear this favourite blasted out live again. They then gave the audience a good taste of the new album with 'Black Water', 'Resurrection Day' and 'Broken'; '...Day' was a particular highlight with lots of "wohoos" teased from the crowd by Bowes. The party was then taken up a gear with the appearance of the ever popular 'The Devil Made Me Do It' (which saw plenty joining in the Bowes "dad dancing") and fan favourite 'Backstreet Symphony' where the crowd really came into full life as they bounced and joined in with the lyrics. 'I'll Be Waiting' slowed the pace for everyone to catch their breath before 'The Thing I Want' and 'When The Music Played' revved up the crowd once more; they really threw themselves into the former with a great response to Bowes' antics. Their main set closed out with the ever present 'Love Walked In' and the party inducing 'I Love You More Than Rock 'N' Roll'. They came back for a highly welcomed and deserved encore and slayed the crowd with a one-two punch of 'Higher Ground' and 'Dirty Love' where the usual reserved German audience gave it plenty as Bowes wrung every last bit of energy they had as he demanded they sung, bounced, cheered and roared to the very end.

Tonight, for me, Thunder proved once again that even after twenty-five years in the business, they are still one of the most entertaining live acts around. The band were superb this evening and this carried on throughout the show with Bowes just amazing from the off whilst the rest of the gang played a blinder as well. This was a fantastic night and one I will remember for a long time; it is good to have them back!

Dave Scott

SNAKECHARMER, HELL TO PAY
Manchester: Academy 3, 04 July 2015

Battling with apathy and feeling that they'd taken the name as far as they could, Manchester's Hell To Pay have played over five hundred local gigs in the last five years, but tonight will be their last. Repeating the Snakecharmer support slot they filled last year, this performance turns out to be one of their very best, mixing the sophisticated twin-guitar wizardry of songs from their sole 'Judgement Day' album with a couple of slightly simpler new tunes that will herald a name change and a start from scratch. Dan Martin has a strong voice and he and Dario Nikzad are great shredders with a good sense of melody, Tom Henshall is all over the drum-kit and recently added bass player Jimmy Beedham (usually guitarist in local band Gypsy) is belatedly what they've been looking for all along. Their Hard Rocking set goes down well and we await their next move with great interest.

Another year on, Snakecharmer find themselves in the same position as Black Star Riders; too talented not to be good, but playing to a crowd that politely listen to the songs from their eponymous album while they wait for the Whitesnake covers to really let their hair down to. To be fair to Snakecharmer, they're not alternating old and new like BSR, the first part of the set consists of cool Rockers like 'Guilty As Charged', 'A Little Rock & Roll' and the excellent 'Accident Prone', with only 'Ready An' Willing' and 'Walking In The Shadow Of The Blues' to punctuate the lion's share of their album.

Ex-Wishbone Ash guitarist Laurie Wisefield and Whitesnake pair Micky Moody and Neil Murray all have their own styles that the band use to the fore, whilst the solid drumming of Thunder/Magnum man Harry James and understated keys of Adam Wakeman make all the right noises. There's no denying that Chris Ousey has a great voice and handles these tunes with ease, but he also has a detached, almost arrogant stage presence that I know some find off-putting. At least he didn't say that the Academy 3 was smaller than his toilet this time.

Micky Moody's slide solo has been overdone over the years and should be left out, but the band know what the audience want and Wisefield's skilled Les Paul playing is a highlight of the groovy 'Slow An' Easy' and a bombastic 'Here I Go Again'. The encore is the high point of the set as the band mix the criminally underrated David Coverdale classic 'Take Me With You' with the inevitable 'Fool For Your Loving', sending a respectably sized crowd home happy.

However, apart from a few moments of genuine inspiration, Snakecharmer are merely the sound of talented people being talented; nothing more, nothing less.

Phil Ashcroft

TYKETTO, BAD TOUCH
Norwich: Waterfront, 29 July 2015

This was pretty much a local gig for Bad Touch. Having recently released their excellent debut 'Half Way Home' and put in a lot of hard work, things are looking good for the young Blues-based Rock 'n' Rollers. Moustachioed vocalist Stevie Woods was an engaging front-man and he blended his own unique moves with a little Mick Jagger and Robert Plant, whilst also having the voice to match. Rhythm guitarist Seeks was another focal point as he threw every shape in the 'How To Be A Rock Star Guitarist' book; in complete contrast lead guitarist Robert Glendining appears somewhat shy on stage – but boy can he play! Whether it was his awesome extended workout during the sprawling Led Zeppelin-inspired 'Preacher' or when he let rip during the rousing finale to set closer 'New Day', he had real feeling and a true understanding of Blues licks. As for the rhythm section, "lead" bassist Michael Bailey could have given Billy Sheehan a run for his money and George Drewery was the adept drummer with the perfect backing vocal contributions.

Lively, fun Rockers 'Waste My Time' and 'Good On Me (Jeans Song)' nodded to the Rolling Stones and Blackberry Smoke, whilst the stomping 'Motherload', first single 'Wise Water' and 'Sweet Little Secret' showed the harder riff-inspired side of the band. Yet it was the delivery of the slower 'Half Way Home' and sublimely mid-tempo 'Words I Never Said' that truly demonstrated the maturity of this bunch of upstarts who are taking Classic Blues Hard Rock and making it their own. They have the songs, the talent, the looks and most importantly youth on their side – I'm expecting big things from them!

You know exactly what you're getting from a Tyketto show – consummate professionalism, (in my opinion) the best singer on the planet and awesome songs you can't help but sing along to. I do miss Brooke St. James a little as he is an original member, however replacing him with my favourite guitar genius Chris Green (Rubicon Cross, Furyon) was an absolute masterstroke, as he and keyboardist/backing vocalist Ged Rylands (Rage Of Angels) have slotted in seamlessly and actually re-invigorated this band, something I never would have thought possible! It's also a shame original bassist Jimi Kennedy is unable to make every tour, but Thunder's Chris Childs is a perfectly adequate and popular replacement.

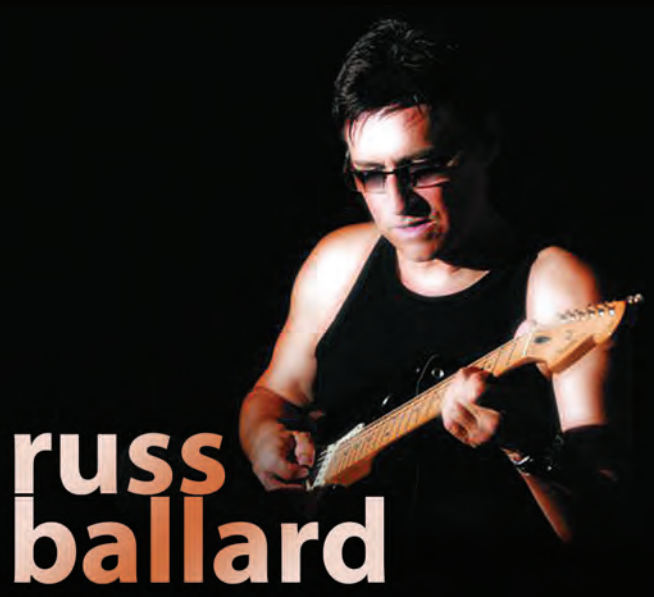
It's difficult to predict these days what they are going to open with – this tour saw 'Love To Love' from the 'Dig In Deep' album. Though Tyketto haven't many albums to select material from, they are constantly discovering ways to keep the set-list fresh. Recent tours have seen inclusions of the odd Danny Vaughn solo number, something long-term Vaughn fans are only too happy to hear, and 'Shadowlands' was a welcome addition. More of a surprise was a selection from the underrated Steve Augeri-fronted 'Shine' album, the rousing 'Let It Go' was an inspired choice, and fair play to Vaughn for delivering it in the same key that Augeri sang it in – and he totally nailed it! The ballad 'Write Your Name In The Sky' also made a comeback after a few years absence.

However, there was still plenty of room for the Tyketto classics – even though many of what are regarded as "the classics" like 'Seasons' and 'Sail Away' are left out – the soaring 'Burning Down Inside' and 'Rescue Me' made early appearances, relative newie 'Dig In Deep' segued neatly into the sing-along 'Lay Your Body Down' mid-set, and how about this for a stunning main-set finishing flourish; 'Strength In Numbers', 'Catch My Fall', 'Standing Alone' and the evergreen 'Wings'? Awesome!

The encore is now becoming somewhat of a tradition; drummer Michael Clayton Arbeeny came out from behind his kit to lead the rhythmic clap-along to 'The Last Sunset' before inevitably the monumental 'Forever Young' took the roof off and left the entire audience with no voice as they matched Vaughn word for word.

2016 will hopefully see a brand new album from this line-up, but before that there is the re-release of 'Don't Come Easy' (finally!) on its 25th anniversary and an ensuing lengthy tour to look forward to. See you down the front!

Ant Heeks



russ ballard

Russ Ballard, originally in The Roulettes backing Adam Faith, became the lead singer and guitarist of Argent in the late 60s who had the notable hits 'God Gave Rock And Roll To You' and 'Hold Your Head Up'. Leaving Argent in 1974, he has had an extensive solo career as well being the writer of internationally famous songs by Roger Daltrey, Rainbow, KISS, America, Santana - the list goes on. Rob McKenzie met up with Russ in Hertfordshire, UK to find out more about his new album entitled 'It's Good To Be Here'.

Tell me about your venture with UMU Music which provides a more personal experience for fans such as providing exclusive videos, tracks and seeing behind the scenes.

Peter Ross [*creator of UMU Music*] started off as a DJ and I first met him when I did an interview with him. He went to LA and came back excited about the concept of Todd Rundgren's [*PatroNet*] subscription service. I have now joined as an artist with UMU Music. Initially I put some demos on the site, then added more tracks and ended up doing an album.

By subscribing, you get merchandise, the album 'It's Good To Be Here', videos that other people don't get and updates from me. It is a long-term thing; I've never stopped working but now it's a channel to do an album a year. I'm pleased that I am still finding things out about myself; I have written hundreds of songs but each time I go into the studio I learn more about engineering and music software. I used Bob Henrit *(Argent, The Kinks)* on the drums for a couple of tracks and I did the rest – guitar, bass, organ.

What's the story behind 'Proud Man'?

Basically, pride is a human condition - you see it more in men. It's happened to me; you have too much pride, you've had a relationship with someone for so long and you don't want to let go – so what are you going to do, proud man? I chose 'Proud Man' to be the last track on the album.

Your voice on the new album sounds lower and a bit grittier than before, is that something you've consciously done?

I did work on it but to an extent it's always been there, some of the Argent albums have some gritty vocals. The problem is I always wrote in high keys and so sang high. Of course when you are singing live, the battle is to get through the whole set if you are doing four nights a week. I remember reading The Beatles did 'Twist And Shout' last, because John's voice would go because of the screaming. As the years go by, you learn how to develop the muscle memory to get through a set.

I notice you included one of your famous solo pieces, 'Voices', which appeared on Miami Vice.

I re-did 'Voices' with a delay unit plug-in and I hit the guitar and set the pulse, it's all guitar. On the original song, David Sancious *(ex E Street Band)* was doing the echo bits. The new version is a bonus track on the album.

Your songwriting often includes strategically placed key changes, what's the theory behind that?

I always used to put in a key change; the verse is meant to be down, the chorus higher, then a solo or middle eight and then the final pay-off high chorus. You go out on a high, that's why I always love to do a key change. Ultimately, on the last chorus, the backing vocalists could do the singing of the chorus and the lead singer just ad libs!

You've done a few solo gigs in recent years in interesting places.

I did Lisbon a couple of years ago. I had crowds of four and half thousand; I never realised my songs had done well there. They knew every single song from my albums! The guy who booked me was a DJ and it turns out his dad was a fan but then the DJ became a fan after listening to the music! You never realise where you are selling well.

I also played in Japan last year. I went with Bob Henrit who I have known since I was thirteen - we joined the Roulettes together - we spent hours talking about our lives. There was a big earthquake whilst I was there. I was on the 22nd floor of the Hilton; in the middle of the night there was a massive rumble. Apparently 19 people died in places not designed to withstand earthquakes

What do you think of your song 'My Kingdom Come' recently recorded by the Graham Bonnet Band?

I received a copy from Graham's manager, Giles Lavery and I replied saying "He's made a great job of it...the pipes are as good as ever"! Don Airey phoned Colin Blunstone who phoned me saying Graham Bonnet wanted to speak to me. Graham asked me to write a song for him, something Progressive - something like Queen. As soon as he said that, I thought about time changes, starting quiet then going into a Rock beat. I really enjoyed it, I then put in the Speed Metal bit; the guitarist [*Conrado Pesinato*] put a lovely solo on it - it's great, I did that sort of solo on the demo but I have lost the files. Graham's singing is very true to the demo.

I was researching your back catalogue and noticed you played with Mike Berry.

I used to be in his band, Mike Berry and The Outlaws, I was the guitarist in 1961 before Ritchie Blackmore. Chas Hodges [*from Chas 'n' Dave*] was also in the band on bass. One day, I was asked to do a session for Joe Meek [*legendary record producer*]. I went to the studio and Joe asked me to play a Chet Atkins song but there was no one else there. After playing it, Joe then came out and said I was great – my manager told me I got the job in the Outlaws. They never said it was an audition!

Regarding famous people singing your songs, you couldn't have done better than Nelson Mandela! *(Ballard co-wrote the music for the 2010 South African World Cup anthem entitled 'Hope')*

It is a song I wrote with Chris Winter; we did it with Nelson Mandela's favourite singer Siphiwo Ntshebe who was a tenor. I said to Siphiwo, "there's a great part in the middle, do you think Nelson Mandela would say some words during it?" So he asked Nelson who then wrote and spoke the words in the middle - 'The generosity of the human spirit can overcome all adversity. Through compassion and caring, we create ... hope.'" His autobiography was called 'Hope' whereas Obama's was called 'The Audacity of Hope'. The people doing the album for the World Cup asked if I would talk to Oprah Winfrey and have a link up with Mandela and Obama. It was going ahead, but a week before the World Cup, Siphiwo sadly died from meningitis.

Tell me about some high profile gigs you are scheduled for in 2016.

I am going to do about ten gigs in Germany and six or seven here in the UK. I am doing the HRH AOR festival; I was asked to do it a few years ago but it's hard to do it for just one gig. If you are doing a series of gigs, it makes sense. Joe Lynn Turner will be there as well; someone said I should go on stage and play guitar when he sings 'I Surrender'!

Further details on Russ Ballard can be found at www.umumusic.com

TIM BOWNESS

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STEVE HACKETT

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